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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

THE BODY AND EMBODIMENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTION ON MATERIAL PRACTICE AND SPIRIUTAL FORMATION

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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Date Received: April 29, 2014

THE BODY AND EMBODIMENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTION ON MATERIAL PRACTICE AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

KEBIRN R. RUSH
MAY 2014

ABSTRACT

The Body and Embodiment: An Interdisciplinary Reflection on Material Practice and Spiritual Formation

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2014

This study explores the constitutive relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation. The primary thesis claims that embodied practices, far from being innocuous to spiritual life, serve formative functions. The purpose of this study centers on developing a practical understanding of the ways bodily and spatial practices can facilitate spiritual growth. Daily body regimes and bodily and spatial practices in worship services can become important means of addressing and facilitating spiritual formation.

Drawing on contemporary research in the cognitive and social sciences, this study intends to bring together embodiment and spirituality as co-constitutive elements in human existence and experience. Discovering the ways the body knows and makes sense of its world becomes essential to understanding how the body forms and informs spiritual experience. Current research in the cognitive and social sciences point out that apprenticeship and ritual practice are key ways the body makes meaning. Developing an integrative approach in which bodily life and spiritual life are intimately intertwined becomes essential to a biblical understanding of human existence.

The study begins by situating the debate within historical contexts in an effort to identify the key philosophical and theological concepts which have come to situate and define the body. Contemporary conceptions of the body are then explored in order to understand the influence of postmodern thought on embodiment. A definition of the body and spirituality in non-reductive terms is offered in an effort to capture the multidimensional structure of each. The study concludes by exploring the practical ways the body contributes to spiritual experience and formation.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 255

To my wife, Laurie, who has been a constant source of strength and encouragement in her unwavering support of my ministry

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INTRODUCTION

Western Christianity has long had an uneasy and ambivalent relationship with the material human body. The material reality of the human flesh, rooted in the everyday practices and concerns of the world, often seems incompatible with the formative purposes of the Spirit. This perceived incompatibility between the material and spiritual realms of human existence is less the result of poor theology than the consequence of poor practice. The modern Protestant Church, especially since the Enlightenment, has generally not taken material existence as essential to spiritual practice. The modern era's insistence on refusing embodiment a meaningful role in epistemology and metaphysics has reduced spiritual experience to mere mental phenomena. A disembodied spirituality, however, becomes detached and disengaged from the daily practices of life, thus neglecting the formative influence of bodily habits and leaving the body and its daily practices outside the redemptive purposes of God.[1]

Such neglect of the important role of the material body can be remedied through an integrative understanding of the ways in which embodied practice facilitates Christian spiritual formation. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from theology and the social sciences, this work examines the important formative function of sensate bodily practice in fixing meaning[2] and shaping Christian spirituality. In a general sense,

[1] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 30-32.

[2] A major problem in determining meaning in discourses on spiritual experience has been the pervasive influence of epistemological methods that posit a disembodied rational "I" as the source. Such dualistic approaches tend to marginalize or neglect the role of the material body in meaning-making. Research in the social sciences in recent decades has revealed the important role of sensate bodily practice in making sense of human experience. For examples of this research in sociology and the sociology of religion, see Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and*

the term "Christian spirituality" refers to the essential human capacity to receive and transmit the life of God. The term denotes an awareness of the abiding presence of God as the Spirit of life and relationship that grounds and supports all human existence.[3] Practically applied, spirituality describes the ways ordinary people attend to their spiritual lives in everyday practice.[4]

That human existence and practice are experienced in the body presents an undeniable fact, but how this fact determines the parameters of spiritual experience and directs discourse on spiritual practice remains a subject of scholarly interest. Conversely, the ways in which religious thought and practice construct understandings of the human body and its role in spiritual practice remain an important topic of investigation.[5] Since the human body mediates all reflection and action upon the world, its centrality to any critical inquiry into religious and spiritual practice seems assured.[6] The intimate

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Modernity (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Meredith B. McGuire, "Why Bodies Matter: A Sociological Reflection on Spirituality and Materiality," *Spiritus* 3 (2003): 1-18; Meredith B. McGuire, "Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (September 1990): 283-296. For examples of this research in social and cultural anthropology, see Margaret Lock, "Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practice and Knowledge," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 133-155; Thomas J. Csordas, "Embodiment as a paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18 (March 1990): 5-47.

[3] Richard Woods, *Christian Spirituality: God's Presence through the Ages* (Chicago: Thomas Moore Press, 1989), 3-4.

[4] McGuire, "Why Bodies Matter," 2. McGuire defines spirituality more broadly in terms of its sociological function, but the definition is useful in that it emphasizes everyday practice such that spirituality is understood as an active process and not merely as an abstract quality.

[5] For a volume of scholarly essays addressing these topics, see Jane Marie Law, ed., *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[6] That this has not always been the case is pointed out by Meredith McGuire, "the present social science conceptions of our subject are particularly disembodied. Whether we are analyzing individual believers or religious organizations or religious ideas, the relationship of humans to their own bodies and to the bodies of others is remote or altogether absent from most of our work." See, Meredith McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 283-284. Likewise, Margaret Lock claims that "a perusal of the canon of social

connection between spirituality and material human bodies necessitates an investigation into the implications of practice for the body which might open the door for new embodied ways of engaging Christian spiritual formation.

The body occupies a central place in Christian thought. The creation story affirms its goodness, the incarnation of Christ gives it theological significance, and the resurrection makes it an essential an enduring part of human life.[7] At its root, then, Christianity is an embodied faith, the religion of incarnation and resurrection of the flesh, and yet the important role of bodily practice in spiritual formation often gets neglected. Such neglect results in alienation of the body and, as a consequence, the broader material world, from spiritual practices. This alienation arises as a consequence of deeply entrenched dualisms inherited from our western metaphysical tradition; dualisms that form the conceptual framework through which the world is understood. Such conceptual framing divides reality into distinct categories such as sacred and profane, and spiritual and physical. Dualistic frameworks tend to privilege one side of the binary, thus presenting a problem for determining meaning since the meaning of spiritual practice gets divorced from its mediating source in bodily practice.

Failure to recognize the interconnection between physicality and spirituality impedes the development of a proper spirituality sufficient to address everyday life in the world. Because this way of perceiving the world proves so pervasive, much of Christianity understands spiritual practice as a process of escaping the bondage of

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and cultural anthropology indicates that the body's explicit appearance has been sporadic throughout the history of the discipline." See, Margaret Lock, "Cultivating the Body," 133.

[7] Colleen M. Griffith, "Spirituality and the Body," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 67-68.

embodiment, or of controlling the body and subordinating it to the mind. It seems more appropriate, however, to understand spiritual practice as a process by which our material bodies are aligned with God's purposes for them. Thus, as temples of the Holy Spirit, material bodies become the site at which the indwelling presence of God becomes manifest in the world.[8]

The purpose of this dissertation is to offer an embodied spirituality rooted in evangelical faith and practice—to re-conceive the body as the per-formative center of spiritual practice and the site at which the fruit of God's presence becomes manifest in the world. Thus, an embodied spirituality becomes per-formative; the bodily performance of apprenticeship, ritual, liturgy, and spiritual disciplines becomes spiritually formative practice. Such an embodied spirituality celebrates the material world, including the body, as sacred space and God's good creation, thus opening the world as sacrament and symbol and bringing together spiritual practice and moral development as inseparable functions of spiritual formation.[9]

Part One of this study addresses the social and historical milieus in which the human body became an issue for discussion. Determining what constitutes a body, and what purpose and function it serves, becomes determinative of its role in spiritual experience. Chapter 1 explores the historical developments of discourses and attitudes toward the body and its role in human experience in terms of their influence on Christian understandings of the role of the human body in spiritual practice. Throughout history

[8] Elizabeth Lewis Hall, "What Are Bodies For? An Integrative Examination of Embodiment," *Christian Scholars Review* 39 (2010): 173-174.

[9] For a recent work emphasizing the important connection between the material creation and redemption, see Jonathan R. Wilson, *God's Good World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

attitudes towards the body have vacillated between ambivalence and embrace and these attitudes are reflected in Christian understandings of the body. Chapter 2 then explores the somatic turn in contemporary culture in an attempt to determine the ways in which various schools of social theory have come to understand the body. Contemporary cultic obsessions with the sensual both open the door for a deeper and richer understanding of embodiment and call the Church to beware of sinful preoccupation and narcissism. In recent decades feminism, race theory, consumer culture, the social and cognitive sciences, and technology have all shaped the way the body gets understood. The turn to the body in the social sciences has made the human body a central topic of study and has radically influenced Christian understandings of the role of the body in spiritual practice.

Part Two offers an interdisciplinary reflection on the body and spirituality in an attempt to illuminate the multidimensional nature of both. The complex nature of human existence and experience simply refuses any absolute reductive approach, thus understanding the body and spirituality in non-reductive ways proves helpful in determining the importance of embodiment to spiritual formation. Chapter 3 draws on contemporary research in the cognitive and social sciences in order to develop a holistic and multidimensional understanding of human embodiment and spirituality. This holistic approach brings material and spiritual experience together as correlative properties of human existence. This interdisciplinary approach has proven the importance of material practice to identity formation and meaning making. Chapter 4 develops the claim that bodily practice can either serve or hinder spiritual formation. Since material practice and embeddedness is an essential element of being human, there can be no escaping the formative powers of material practices. Practices imposed by consumer culture can and

do have a powerful impact on perceptions of spirituality and spiritual formation. Thus, the Church must be aware of practices that are subversive to true biblical spirituality.

Part Three brings together material practice and spiritual formation in an effort to develop the idea that human bodies serve as the loci of God's glory and presence in the world. Humans are storied beings and the narrative character of theology helps situate the human condition within God's redemptive plan. This redemptive plan involves human bodies, thus making embodiment essential. Chapter 5 examines the biblical story of the body in the context of the creation, sanctification, the life and ministry of Christ, and the theology of the Apostle Paul. Understanding the human person holistically offers a biblical and theological perspective affirming of the human body and its place in spiritual practice. Focusing on the Hebraic emphasis on calling, listening, memory, and fidelity offers a powerful biblical model for engaging the body in spiritual life. Chapter 6 then examines the role of the human body in the life and practice of the Church and argues for an essential relationship between the human body and the communal body of Christ. This chapter describes the important, but often neglected, role the human body plays in apprenticeship, ritual practice, and yearly festivals of the Church and brings together the Church as Body of Christ and the human body as essential and inseparable elements of spiritual formation.

Part Four addresses some of the practical implications of reconceiving the material body as instrumental and functionally necessary to making sense of spiritual experience. Recent research in the social sciences has produced convincing evidence that the sensate body plays an essential role in meaning-making and identity formation. Chapter 7 explores ways to re-conceive human bodily practice in relation to belief, time,

and memory. This chapter offers embodiment as a methodological principle for understanding belief and practice as co-constitutive elements of human experience. Reconnecting with the rhythms and cycles of liturgical practice can be a way to re-engage the body in a spiritually formative way. Chapter 8 then explores the influence of bodily and spatial practice on ordering and making sense of the world and suggests that physical space serves an important role in directing bodily practice. Architectural form directs bodily practice and, as such, reveals attitudes and conception of spiritual processes. Additionally, architectural form influences and directs worship styles by promoting certain practices and impeding others. A description of the ways in which emotions, desires, and physical needs fit into the spiritual life is then explored. By exploring the analogy between bodily vision and spiritual vision, and the role of *eros* in human experience, it becomes possible to develop spiritual practices that take serious all aspects of human existence. Thus, far from being unnecessary or unbearable burdens to spirituality, the longings of the body can be celebrated as means by which the whole person experiences the presence and glory of God.

PART ONE

(RE)MEMBERING THE HUMAN BODY FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

A MINISTRY CONSIDERATION

CHAPTER 1

A HISTORY OF AMBIVALENCE AND EMBRACE

A prayer of blessing taken from a Jewish prayer book reads, "We thank You for the covenant sealed in our flesh."[1] Recited after each meal, this prayer calls those gathered around the table to remember their covenant relationship with God—a relationship marked in the flesh by circumcision. Carried in the flesh and enacted through communal historical memory, the ritual practice continually makes present the call of God to remember. This example of Jewish ritual practice serves to illustrate the importance of material bodily practice to spirituality.[2] The content of the prayer calls attention to the material embeddedness of those engaged in the ritual act. The prayer repeated after a meal—acknowledging material provision necessary for sustaining the body—offers thanks for the covenant with its material provisions and requirements. Marking the flesh serves as material seal establishing and evidencing covenant identity

[1] Andrea Lieber, *The Essential Guide to Jewish Prayers and Practices* (New York: Alpha Books, 2012), 61; also Jules Harlow, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom: A Prayerbook for Shabbat, Festivals, and Weekdays* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1985). For a discussion of the religious and ritual significance of circumcision, see Leonard B. Glick, *Marked in the Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[2] Other examples could be cited such as Sabbath rituals, death and burial rites, and the priestly blessing. See Louis Jacobs, "The Body in Jewish Worship: Three Rituals Examined," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 71-89.

and fidelity. This marking of the flesh serves no mere symbolic function, however, for it is more than an outward symbol expressing a state of affairs; rather, the performative act calls a state of affairs into being.[3]

Embodied performance of ritual actions both form and inform by way of making meaning and establishing a sense of personal and cultural identity.[4] Through material practices religious and spiritual meaning become inscribed in the body, thus bodily performance, the "doing" of the act, often precedes the cognitive act of interpreting symbolic intent, such that knowledge and practice conjoin in a pre-reflective understanding. In this way embodied practices serve to confirm the reality of the ritual act and not simply the symbolic idea.[5] Ritual actions, therefore, embody a spiritual power; they do not merely express so much as create.[6] Thus, the body matters. The material reality of the body serves as part of the grounding of human experience in reality.[7] The vocalization of the prayer and the marked flesh remind the hearers that the material reality of the body provides a link to a reality that transcends the body. The body can be understood, therefore, as the site at which the relational and abiding presence and

[3] For a discussion of the role of embodied practice in the spiritual experience of ancient Judaism, see Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), 404.

[4] Robert Orsi notes how religious idioms if appropriated and inherited serve to establish identity and meaning by making the world rather than reflecting or mirroring it. See Robert Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 10.

[5] McGuire, "Why Bodies Matter," 4.

[6] Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

[7] McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 284.

power of God become most manifest to the world. The body becomes the locus of the Spirit's formative, transformative, and performative power.

The idea of practice marks a central feature of Hebraic thought, such that the assertion can be made that a person is what a person does.[8] The assertion that a person is what a person does in the body should in no way imply that personhood can be reduced to mere biological function. No physical reductionism applies here, however, to claim that the material body is constitutive of an "I" seems justifiable, and yet, the "I" cannot be reduced to the body.[9] This present work makes no pretense toward developing a theological or philosophical anthropology, as important as those are, the question here centers not on the "what" of the human person, but the "how" of spiritual formation. The practical outworking and relationship of material conditions and embodied practice to spiritual formation shapes the focus of this project. As the above example of Jewish spiritual practice demonstrates, the body plays an important role in determining an orientation to God, others, and the world. Nevertheless, in the history of religious thought, the body has been a contested site and attitudes toward the body have wavered between ambivalence and embrace. The present chapter provides a brief sketch of historical discourses on the body and its role in producing meaning and shaping identity in an effort to show how the body became a contested issue. Spirituality and spiritual formation are about meaning and identity, but neither can be sufficiently addressed independent of the material conditions which help shape them.

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[8] For a discussion of the emphasis on practice over theory in Hebraic thought, see William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 69-91.

[9] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 12-13.

The Contested Body: Theorizing and Material Practice

The historian Caroline Walker Bynum published an article with this question in the title: "Why All the Fuss about the Body?"[10] The article was written at the request of a friend who observed that contemporary scholarly literature on the body evidenced a lack of attention to the practical daily lived experience of embodied practice. The thinking was that an open dialogue between pre-modern and modern ideas of the body would reintroduce something of the day to day material experience of embodiment missing in contemporary literary and feminist theory.[11] Pre-modern attitudes toward the body, it was assumed, were more attentive to the material bodily grounding of religious experience. As Bynum points out, however, her friend's expectations were only partly right, for in both periods discourses on the body were multiple and multivalent.[12] Pre-modern social and religious practices did indeed evidence a sense of the immediacy of bodies, as Bynum points out, but pre-modern approaches could likewise be highly abstract, dissolve into discourse, and reduce the body to theory.[13]

Theorizing the Self as a Unified Point of Reference

As Bynum's work on pre-modern religious practice points out, many of the philosophical theories about the body developed in late antiquity and the high Middle Ages attempted to answer questions of the continuity of the self over time. In other

[10] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Autumn 1995): 1-33.

[11] Ibid., 1.

[12] Ibid., 12-19.

[13] Ibid.

words, the central question in discourses on the body was, "How can the 'I' continue to be 'I' through time, both the time of the earth and the time of the eschaton?"[14] Answers to this question inevitably shape perceptions of the body and its role in meaning-making and identity formation. The historical background to this question traces back at least to Plato who emphasized the self-identical and unchanging immaterial soul as constituting the unified self. Likewise, Plato's emphasis on the self-identical and unchanging immaterial soul may be regarded as the historical basis for the idea of the self as a unified point of reference necessary for safeguarding personal identity and the continuity of experience—an idea that dominated much early modern discourse.

Conceptualizing the self in terms of the immaterial soul alone, reducing the self solely to cognitive function—which Plato did in the ancient world and Descartes and Locke did in the modern—neglects the important role of the body. As such, the self comes to be conceived as a unified agent accessible through introspection alone independent of any interactions with the body or any other external realities. This reduction of the self to distinct and independent categories of mind renders the body an object and its role a matter of debate. What results is a mind-matter dichotomy in which knowledge and theory are conceived as operating at the level of mind while the emotions and practice are identified with the body. This raises serious questions about the role of the body, however, thus rendering it a site of contested and competing theories. This issue becomes important, as evidenced in Bynum's article, because conceptions of the body determine the basic guiding assumptions that govern theorizing about religion and spirituality.

[14] Ibid., 19-27.

Theorizing as Material Practice

Theorizing on religion and spirituality often floats free from its mooring in material practice resulting in theory detached, disembodied, and indifferent to the daily lived experience of material existence.[15] This need not seem surprising given that religion and spirituality are often conceived primarily as private and interior concerns unaffected by the givenness of daily embodied experience.[16] Such theory, however, offers few resources to explore religious and spiritual experiences as they are formed and informed by daily material practices, for it fails to take account of the ways in which such experiences are materially grounded. Theory detached from the material embeddedness of its subject matter neglects the important influence material conditions such as bodily routines, cultural production, and economic and political conditions have on the making of meaning. Divorcing theory from practice in this way has exacerbated the inside-outside distinction between mind and body, thus separating knowing from doing and establishing a causal priority of thinking over bodily acting.[17]

The tendency in the study of religion and spirituality to bifurcate theory and practice as if they occupied different domains proves problematic to their study. Theory, on the one hand, has been identified with the abstract, the decontextualized, and the general, occupying the realm of ideas. Practice, on the other hand, has been identified with the concrete, the day-to-day actions, occupying the realm of the material. In this

[15] Terry Eagleton notes, "Traditional scholarship has for centuries ignored the everyday life of common people. Indeed, it was life itself it used to ignore, not just the everyday." See Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 4.

[16] See Orsi, "Everyday Miracles," 6.

[17] Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Cultural Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (2002): 251.

epistemological binary, theory and practice are positioned in opposition to one another and matter and meaning are separated. A serious problem surfaces here, however, for the practice of theorizing must itself be viewed in terms of material practice, as Karen Barad points out, "To theorize is not to leave the material world behind and enter the domain of pure ideas where the lofty space of the mind makes objective reflection possible. Theorizing . . . is a material practice."[18] Theorizing as material practice takes serious the co-constitutive relationship with its subject matter. An intra-relationship between theory and thing exists, such that, they do not exist in isolation from each other.[19] It has been said that theorizing as material practice focusses as much on "the practitioner's hands as the observer's eyes."[20]

Arguably, then, theorizing about religion and spirituality must take account of the material conditions of human experience as co-constitutive of religious and spiritual experience. The body becomes the point at which theory and practice conjoin for, as David Chidester points out, "As material site, malleable substance, and shifting field of relations, the body is situated at the center of the production and consumption of religion and popular culture."[21] There has been, however, a long and ongoing debate concerning the relationship between the spiritual and the material and within this debate there has been no solely determinate notion of the body. The polyvalence of embodiment becomes

[18] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Half way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 55.

[19] Richard Edwards, "Materializing Theory: Does Theory Matter?" Paper presented at the BERA Annual Conference (2009), http://www.spatialdesign.info/blog/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/Edwards-R_MaterialisingTheory_doestheorymatter_.pdf (accessed October 5, 2013).

[20] Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 152.

[21] David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 25.

evident in the history of western discourse on the role of the body in making meaning and identity formation.[22] A cursory reading on this subject will attest that attitudes toward the body throughout history have varied from ambivalence to embrace.

The Remembered Body: Ambivalence and Embrace

To remember the body means more than mere historical reflection, it means to recall the body to its rightful place at the center of ongoing discourses on spiritual life.[23] There have been tendencies throughout Christian history to confirm the body as God's good creation in theory, but to cast a negative shadow over it in practice.[24] To remember requires coming to terms with the fact that the Christian tradition has long had an uneasy and ambivalent relationship with the material human body.[25] The body presents an uncertainty, an opacity and resistance, which often opens a gulf between the spiritual person and bodily existence. At times the body seems to impose itself as if something

[22] Many scholars have argued that there is no such thing as "the body," as an immutable and unitary substance; rather, they argue, there are multiple bodies marked by an infinite array of differences. See Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, "Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction," in *Feminist Theory and the Body*, eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (London: Routledge University Press, 1999); Barbara Holdrege, "Body," in *Studying Hinduism: Key Concepts and Methods*, eds. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (London: Routledge University Press, 2008).

[23] Dallas Willard wrote, "Probably the least understood aspect of progress in Christlikeness is the role of the body in spiritual life." See Dallas Willard, "The Spirit Is Willing: The Body as a Tool for Spiritual Growth," in *The Christian Educators Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, eds. Kenneth O. Gangel and James Wilhoit (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 225.

[24] There are reasons to be cautious of over attending the body and its sensual appetites. Embodiment does present liabilities to spiritual formation and carries alienating tendencies harmful to spiritual growth. At issue here are ways in which practice can hinder teaching. Spiritual practice can serve to alienate and neglect the body even though theologically we confess its goodness. For ways in which the body can be a liability to spiritual life, see Richard J. Foster, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperColins, 2008), 126-127.

[25] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Brown claims that human physicality was in practice understood by early Christians in a wide variety of ways. The fact that there was no established ecclesial position on the nature of the body gave rise to the uneasy and ambivalent attitude of Christianity towards it.

foreign, and indeed, often serves as a mask concealing rather than revealing the person.[26] The seventh century Abbot of Sinai, John Climacus, sums up this ambivalence well in reference to his own body: "He is my helper and my enemy, my assistant and my opponent, a protector and a traitor."[27] This struggle evinces a double vision; the body at once perceived negatively as an occasion of sin, and positively as God's good creation. There is no escaping the matter, however, for physicality forms an essential and enduring feature of being human. Again, to quote Climacus, "How can I break away from him when I am bound to him forever? How can I escape from him when he is going to rise with me?"[28] Indeed, the history of Christianity evinces a constant grappling with the question of how to transform the fallen human flesh in light of the integrity it represents as God's good creation.[29]

The Church's Dual Inheritance

To gain a sense of the complexity involved in attempting an answer to this question requires a brief look back at some of the dominant historical voices and social conditions that gave shape to the metaphysical traditions through which the answer gets addressed. This brief historical survey serves only to reorient the discussion around the

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[26] Olivier Clement, "Life in the Body," *Ecumenical Review* 33 (April 1981): 129.

[27] John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Assent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 29.

[28] Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Assent*, 29. For insightful discussions of the influence of John Climacus on Greek Christianity, see Kallistos Ware, "'My Helper and My Enemy': The Body in Greek Christianity," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 90-110; John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Dessert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

[29] Wanda Deifelt, "For God Is also the God of Bodies: Embodiment and Sexuality in Martin Luther's Theology," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 7: 2 (February 2007): 1.

practical issue of the formative function of embodiment in spiritual formation. To state it very simplistically, and in accord with a tradition partly popularized by Rudolf Bultmann, the Christian tradition is the heir of a double inheritance: the Hebraic tradition with its emphasis on calling-listening and memory-fidelity, and the Hellenistic tradition with its emphasis on seeing-discerning and thinking-possessing.[30] The important influence of these traditions on Christian understandings of the material human body and its role in the spiritual life deserves consideration. Both of these traditions have been influential in the formation of Christian thought over the centuries, and both offer valuable insight into the relationship between bodily existence and spiritual life. It is important, therefore, to pause and draw out some critical distinctions between traditional Hebraic culture and the culture of the classical Greeks as those distinctions relate to conceptions of the body and its role in producing meaning.

It must be acknowledged that any attempt to briefly trace the origin and development of ideas and neatly fix them within essentializing categories will inevitably tend to oversimplification and fail to do justice to the local diversity and tensions among fluid discursive and nondiscursive practices.[31] As Karen King has demonstrated in her work on early Christianity, "literary works" and "intellectual influences" migrate between "heterogeneous social groups (as did Scripture and Platonic writings among

[30] Cf. Rudolph Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1960). For further discussion of the distinctions between these two traditions, see Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: Norton, 1970); Marlene Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); see also Walter Kaufmann's "I and You: A Prologue," in Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 32-37.

[31] Manuel A.Vasquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22.

Jews, Christians, and Greek philosophers)."[32] Intellectual influences get appropriated, transformed, and cross-fertilized as they are taken up by other groups, thus creating "complex, overlapping, and multifarious clusters of material."[33] This does not mean, however, that tracing salient lines of influence becomes impossible. There are evident categories of belief and practice from both Hebraic and Greek traditions that can be identified as influential on the formation of Christian conceptions of the body.

To the classical Greek of the fifth century BC, human persons were thought of in terms of a single universal essence: reason. [34] As a rational animal the human person could discover objective and universal truths about the world and moral values through intellectual argumentation. Through reasoned contemplation alone the soul ascends to comprehension of the supreme Good. From this philosophical position, seeing becomes a mental act by which the mind discerns its object and through proper discernment takes cognitive possession of it. The bodily senses are a source of debate in early Greek thought; on the one hand, they are perceived as a hindrance to the pursuit of truth because they are often the source of deception and so cannot be fully trusted. On the other hand, the senses are perceived as a source of insight and a necessary precondition for

[32] Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 221.

[33] Karen King, "Which Early Christianity?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, eds. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71.

[34] Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 112-113.

knowledge.[35] Nevertheless, classical Greek culture conceptualizes a detached faculty of reason as the means to access objective, timeless, and universal truths.

Things appear otherwise in traditional Hebraic culture where the covenant relationship with God becomes the locus of identity and not human reason. To the traditional Hebrew, truth cannot be grasped through reasoned contemplation alone, but must be discovered through obedience to God's call and through faithful commitment to the covenant. Truth resides locally and historically, always in need of preservation through story and ritual practice which involves listening (hearing) and memory. The senses play an important role in remembering and passing on the covenant tradition since the covenant involves a relationship with God and others lived out bodily in this world.

Thus, an obvious distinction worth noting is that between the Hebraic privileging of hearing and practice and the Greek privileging of seeing and theory.[36] If it can be said that the Classical Greek takes as essential the human ability to reason, then it must be pointed out that the ancient Hebrew takes as essential the human ability to relate, to sense the call of the sacred.[37] These two worlds intersect and diverge at various points throughout Christian history, nevertheless, tracing the philosophical influences on conceptions of the body in the Western Church inevitably leads back to the intellectual world of the ancient Greeks and the writings of Plato.

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[35] Even Plato acknowledges the role of bodily vision and *eros* in ascending from perception of a particular instance of beauty to knowledge of beauty itself, see Plato *Symposium* 210a-211c; *Phaedrus* 251a-e.

[36] Bultmann understands the contrast between the Greek and Hebraic as that between sight and hearing. The Hebraic emphasis on calling becomes very different from the Greek *logos* which Bultmann understands as a manifestation rather than a summons. See Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*.

[37] Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, 113.

Platonic Philosophy and the Body

The Platonic view of the soul can be asserted with certainty, for Plato holds unquestionably to a chronological and ontological priority of the immaterial soul over the material body.[38] Plato's view of the body, however, does not appear as certain, for he seems never to have found an adequate solution to the most vexing problem concerning mind-body dualism, how a physical substance can relate to an immaterial substance. Thus, Plato's view of the body appears to vacillate between rejection and refinement—from the body as agent of harm to outright war between body and soul.[39] The most positive view of the body appears in the *Timaeus* where Plato articulates a harmonious and holistic cosmology in which human constitution is perceived as corresponding to the constitution of the universe. The universal divine soul permeates the universe and holds it together in unity. In the same way, the soul holds the body together, animating it, moving it, and giving it life.[40] Plato's anthropology, therefore, mirrors his cosmology in which the human person comes to be understood analogously to the universe; the person perceived as a copy, a reflection, or an image of the cosmos. As living creatures, both the great body of the cosmos and the little body of the human being are endowed with

[38] Plato *Phaedo* 80b, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997). Further citations from Plato will be from this edition unless otherwise noted. For a brief survey of Plato's teaching concerning the soul, see Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 6-19. For a more detailed account of Plato's philosophy, see M. R. Wright, *Introducing Greek Philosophy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010). For an account of Platonic Dualism, see L. P. Gerson, "Platonic Dualism," *Monist* 69:3 (July, 1986): 352-369.

[39] See John Dillon, "Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonic Asceticism," in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York :Oxford University Press, 1995); T. M. Robinson, "The Defining Features of Mind-Body Dualism in the Writings of Plato," in *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37-55.

[40] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 70; Dillon, "Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body," 85; Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 23-25.

rational soul which gives life and direction to the body.[41] Here rejection is not the emphasis, but disciplining and refining the body to make it a worthy and non-harmful receptacle of the soul.

The body, with its sensual appetites, exists in a world of constant flux. The visible world of sense experience changes constantly, things come into being and go out of being, and therefore cannot be the locus of reality. The bodily senses are rooted in this changing world and, therefore, cannot be a legitimate and reliable source of knowledge, for if things are constantly changing they cannot be known with any sense of certainty.[42] To solve this epistemological problem Plato posits the world of being as eternal, unchanging, complete, and incorporeal. Reality exists only in the immaterial world of the intelligible and immutable Forms which are available only to the intellect. The immaterial intellectual soul, according to Plato, exists as the true person and it alone is immortal.[43] Thus, for Plato the self or soul is eternal, self-identical, unchanging, and available only to the intellect. The intellect allows true sight, thus intellection becomes a kind of seeing—a seeing with the mind's eye.

[41] Plato *Timaeus* 30b, 81a. The early Fathers of the Church adopted this Platonic view of the body-soul distinction as a microcosm of the problem of the relation between God and the universe; see Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150-750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 74; John G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 69. For a survey of the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on the western Catholic tradition, see Andrew Louth, "The Body in Western Catholic Christianity," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111-114.

[42] Plato *Phaedo* 65b-c; here Plato argues that the bodily senses cannot provide accurate knowledge of reality, for reason alone is able to manifest realty.

[43] For the soul as the true person, see Plato *Alcibiades* 130c. For the immortality of the soul, see Plato *Republic* 613e-621d; here in the Myth of Er Plato offers an account of the fate of the soul after its release from the body at death.

In the Platonic tradition seeing becomes an operation of the mind in which truth and beauty are perceived by the "eye of the mind" unsullied by sense perception.[44] Here the rational soul, through a pure operation of the mind, ascends its dark cave of ignorance, frees itself from the chains binding it to the world of sensory experience, and comes to contemplate the true Forms of things.[45] The temporal and mutable body, with its instincts and emotions, is made use of by the soul in this life, but remains extrinsic to true personhood. The body and its impulses, though not evil in Plato's thought, are nonetheless a hindrance and must be subordinate to and controlled by the rational soul.[46] The worldly human condition then, in Platonic expression, is the intellect temporarily entombed in a material body from which it aspires to freedom. The body for Plato acts as a tomb imprisoning the soul and the ultimate future hope for the human person lies in an existence stripped of all physicality.[47] In this sense, Plato articulates a view of the body that comes closer to rejection than refinement for, as he claims in the *Republic*, the soul must liberate itself from the "turmoil," "confusion," and "lust" associated with material existence, the soul "must be quit of the body" in order to return to itself.[48] While Plato's ambivalence toward the body is evident and needs to be recognized, it must likewise be recognized that not all Greek Philosophers held such drastic body denying views.

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[44] There is an emphasis on physical sight as the most preferred of the senses in both Plato and Aristotle, but privileged status belongs in both traditions to the "mind's eye" and not the physical sense organ.

[45] See the allegory of the cave in Plato *Republic* 514a-517a.

[46] See the analogy of the charioteer in Plato *Phaedrus* 246ab, 253c-254b.

[47] Kallistos Ware, "My Helper and My Enemy," 91. Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 82e-83b, *Cratylus* 400bc.

[48] See Plato, *Republic*, Book 6.

Aristotle and the Soul-Body Composite

In contrast to Plato's view, Aristotle contends that soul and body cannot be so clearly separated; form and matter are not two distinct entities, but "complementary and inextricably connected aspects of all living beings."[49] Given the inseparability of form and matter, Aristotle found no need of Plato's universals as the realm of reality, for reality in Aristotelian terms resides in the particular things themselves. Furthermore, Aristotle insisted that the soul itself was made up of different parts, each having different functions. This alternative to the dualistic philosophy of Plato was available to early Christian thinkers, but its value was generally unrecognized until well into the medieval period.[50]

Aristotle clearly expresses a more unified theory of the human person in which soul and body are correlative principles in the same way as form and matter. The soul gives the body its true nature, thus becoming the actuality of a body that has the potentiality for life.[51] The soul not only actualizes the body, it likewise provides it with shape, organization, and purpose. In other words, the soul acts as first principle of the body and serves as agent of the body's related functions of life, growth, locomotion,

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[49] Philip J. Van Der Eijk, "Aristotle's Psycho-physiological Account of the Soul-Body Relationship," in *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63. For the difference in philosophical understandings of the body-soul relationship between Plato and Aristotle, see Benedict Ashley, O.P., *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: The Pope John Paul Center, 1985), 148-156.

[50] Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, 149.

[51] Aristotle *On the Soul* B.412a, 415b. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: The Peripatetic Press, 1981). For a defense of the Aristotelian view of the soul, see Ric Machuga, *In Defense of the Soul: What it Means to Be Human* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).

perception, sensation and reason.[52] Understanding the soul as the body's final cause suggests that the body exists for the sake of the soul, nevertheless, Aristotle insists that the two cannot be separated.[53] In this respect, Aristotle differs dramatically from Plato in denying the soul can pre-exist or survive the death of the body. The soul, in Aristotelian terms, since not a primary substance, cannot exist on its own independent of a body.[54] Thus, for Aristotle, the body and soul are one just as the wax and the shape given it by the stamp are one.[55] In this sense, Aristotle represents a recovery of the body.

As a rematerialization of Plato's dualistic idealism, Aristotle's recovery of the body and natural world provides the framework for the emergence of the natural sciences. It only stands to reason, for if form and matter cannot be separated, if forms are always located in material bodies, and reality exists in particular things rather than universals, then empirical knowledge of the world becomes legitimate and valuable.[56] This unified view finds embodiment more favorable than did Plato, nevertheless, despite Aristotle's emphasis on the unity of body and soul, he insists that reason remains separable and cannot be the act of a bodily organ.[57] The human faculty of sensation remains dependent

[52] Aristotle *On the Soul* B. 413a.

[53] Aristotle *On the Soul* B. 415b.

[54] Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul*, 23; M. R. Wright, *Introducing Greek Philosophy*, 130-131.

[55] Aristotle *On the Soul* B. 412b.

[56] Vasquez, *More than Belief*, 25.

[57] Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, 154; Van Der Eijk, "Aristotle's Psycho-physiological Account of the Soul-Body Relationship," 70.

upon the body, but mind, he claims, is separate and capable of thinking itself.[58] The mind, according to Aristotle, because an unchanging and unmixed actualizing force, must be superior to the passive factor of matter.[59] The mind for Aristotle becomes the Form of Forms and as such is immortal and eternal.[60] Thus, in the end it appears that Aristotle never wrested free of the Platonic hierarchy of the disembodied mind, leaving knowledge a product of the power of the mind.

The two philosophers do serve as the source of a common influence, however, for Aristotle, like Plato before him, develops a conception of sight as an extension of the power of the mind. Aristotle places much more emphasis on the bodily eye, however, claiming sight as the primary means of knowing and most preferred among the senses.[61] He does, nevertheless, prioritize the cognitive over the sensate. The pervasive influence of this occularcentric position proliferated by Plato and Aristotle becomes the grounds for the later subject-object distinction dominant in modern western metaphysics. In this schema the body gets understood conceptually as an object among other objects, an object which plays little role in making meaning, and which itself has no meaning outside of the conceptual categories of reason.

[58] Aristotle *On the Soul* G. 429b.

[59] Aristotle *On the Soul* G. 430a.

[60] Aristotle *On the Soul* G. 430a.

[61] Aristotle *Metaphysics* A. 1. 980a.

Stoicism and Gnosticism at the Extremes

Later thinkers develop positions on the body in dialogue with Plato and Aristotle, often expanding beyond them toward one extreme or the other. The Stoics for their part offer an anthropology in which the mind and the body constitute a single consubstantial entity, thus presenting the human person as a psychophysical whole.[62] This anthropological view, in modified form, appealed to some of the early Church Fathers, but the Stoic indifference to suffering and their disdain for the bodily affections as errant impulses impeding the soul's progress toward serenity led other Church Fathers to reject stoicism as contrary to Christian confidence in the essential goodness of God's creation.[63]

While early Christian thought evidences ambivalence towards the body, it does not endorse an outright rejection. The tension for early Christians centered on the struggle to transform the flesh, not deny it. Movements that outright reject the flesh typically are treated as heretical; such is the case with Gnosticism. Gnostic thought evinces a strong ontological dualism which favors spirit while disparaging the material world. The Gnostic despair of the material body produces escapist schemas of salvation in which disembodied existence proves essential to full spiritual freedom. Although Gnostic teachings were varied and complex, leading King to argue that there is no "Gnosticism" as a universal body of teaching;[64] rejection of the material world including the body proves a common theme throughout Gnostic thought. Unfortunately, even though

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[62] J. Albert Harrill, "Stoic Physics, The Universal Conflagration, and the Eschatological Destruction of the 'Ignorant and Unstable' in 2 Peter," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, eds. Thomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Ismo Dunderberg (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 119.

[63] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 74 Ashley, *Theologies of the Body*, 117.

[64] See King, "What is Gnosticism."

considered heretical, Gnostic like influences can be found in the Christian tradition.[65] As Luke Timothy Johnson notes, "[Christianity's] repulsion of [Gnosticism] did not make it immune from a virus of suspicion toward the body that has been profound, pervasive, and permanent."[66]

Early Christianity and the Body

While each of these traditions evidences an influence over the Church's theological formation of the body, only Gnosticism insists on a disparaging view of materiality. Early Christianity, it has been pointed out, was in practice a material religion in which spirituality was closely tied to material concerns such as healing, nutrition, and fertility.[67] The body became a source and grounds for making meaning in the world and, Keith Thomas points out, during the Middle Ages people often sought meaning through bodily immersion in religious and spiritual practice.[68] In other words, the medieval church engaged the bodily sensual impulses of the people by organizing activities through sacred and symbolic ritual practices which engaged the body.[69] The Eucharist served as one of the main ritual practices and, as Vasquez notes, "The centrality of public

[65] For a thorough and detailed discussion of Gnostic influence on Christian belief, see Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[66] Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Revelatory Body: Notes Toward a Somatic Theology," in *The Phenomenology of the Body*, ed. Daniel J Martino (Pittsburgh: Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center at the University of Duquesne, 2003), 82.

[67] For a discussion of the importance of food to early religious practice, see McGuire, "Why Bodies Matter," 9-11; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (Summer 1985): 1-25. For discussions of health, fertility, and nutrition, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Brown, *The Body and Society*.

[68] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 27-58.

[69] Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 68.

rituals in late-antique Christianity also meant that the senses were key loci where humans encountered the sacred."[70]

Medieval Christianity's conception of embodiment arises out of ancient religious preoccupations with the immediacy of the body, so that the incarnation did not present such a paradox to the early Christian mind. Indeed, early Christians understood their bodies in relation to Christ's body, as Peter Brown points out, they understood the body as a symbol of Christ's victory over death and the corrupt worldly order.[71] Likewise, Bynum's work on medieval religious practice emphasizes a remarkable continuity between the spiritual and the material regarding concern for the resurrection of the body which, as she points out, was consistently represented through tropes of organic growth.[72] The concept of the human person in medieval Christian belief, Bynum argues, was neither the soul escaping the body, nor the soul using the body, but a holistic self integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, and identity.[73] Thus, Bynum's work in medieval Christian belief evidences a sense of the immediacy of the body.

Early Christian practice involved, what Mellor and Shilling refer to as, "body regimes" which intended to encourage people to transform their fallen and sinful bodies

[70] Vasquez, *More than Belief*, 30.

[71] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 44-57.

[72] Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6. See also Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 161. Wilken argues, "The Christian doctrine of the resurrection shaped Christian understanding of the human person and in turn formed the culture of the West."

[73] Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 11.

through meaningful bodily practices.[74] In other words, the fall brought with it a tension between the passions of the body and the formation of the spirit which required attention and religious practices was the means of working through this tension. Nevertheless, early Christians continued to view the body as an integral part of the spiritual life.[75] Throughout the middle ages, Mellor and Shilling point out, "bodies maintained a sensual relationship with the sacred" and thus were present and active in spiritual life.[76] This more sensual view of the body began to change, however, with the changing attitudes of the Modern period and the rise of Reformation movements.

The Long Reformation had the effect of de-sensualizing the faith; it moved religious life away from bodily forms of ritual practice towards a more cognitive understanding of religion.[77] The Reformation moved Christian practice away from images and rituals toward the written text, such that, ritual actions no longer had the power to bring about a real state of affairs; rather, they became mere representations and forms of symbolic communication.[78] Thus, in Protestantism bodies became more centered on words and symbols than the sensory impulses of the body. As Mellor and Shilling note, "The eyes and ears were valued insofar as they had the potential to provide unsullied access to the word of God, but touch and smell were certainly implicated in the

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[74] Mellor and Shilling, *Re-forming the Body*, 36-37.

[75] Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus Press, 1979), 57-58.

[76] Mellor and Shilling, *Re-forming the Body*, 37.

[77] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 613; Ashley, *Theologies of the* Body, 186; Vasquez, *More than Belief*, 32; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 34.

[78] Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 13; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 34; Vasquez, *More than Belief*, 32.

body's sinfulness."[79] This move bears a connection with the western tendency to equate the eye with the mind—to conflate seeing with knowing—while neglecting the fact that sight itself is one of the senses.

Modernity and the Dismembered Body

The body and its role in making meaning and establishing identity encounters further problems in the modern period with new developments in philosophical method. Socio-cultural forces began straining old structures of authority in religion, education, and politics.[80] Individualism and skepticism began to develop new responses to old questions of human existence. New discoveries of ancient texts offered alternative views to those offered by the church. The rise of the mechanical universe with its mechanistic understanding of the body and the displacement of Aristotelian cosmology raised doubts about epistemological certainty. This paradigm shift in cosmology also raised questions about the nature of the human, for premodern thinkers tended to understand the human person as a microcosm of the universe.[81] With the authority of the church, government, and education in doubt, the search for new ways to ground the self and knowledge got underway.

The philosophical traditions of empiricism and rationalism arise as an attempt to address this epistemological conundrum and overthrow skepticism. Both traditions seek

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[79] Mellor and Shilling, *Re-forming the Body*, 10; Cf. Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[80] For a discussion of the background of this revolution, see Montague Brown, *Restoration of Reason: The Eclipse and Recovery of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 47-63.

[81] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 74.

to make knowledge of the real world possible, to return epistemological certainty to the human quest to know the self and its world, and they attempt to do so by introducing a single epistemological method.[82] Though the methods differ, the empiricist grounds knowledge in experience while the rationalist insists on the primacy of ideas, they both share a similar consequence, for they begin with the knowing subject rather than the object. In order to confront skepticism, modern metaphysics moved from subjective certainty to objective knowledge.[83] Unlike the ancient and medieval thinkers, for whom the object of knowledge could be anything in the world of being, the modern rationalists and empiricists reduced knowledge to impressions or ideas in the mind.[84] In both traditions the sensate knowledge of the body becomes marginalized, neglected, or ignored.

The Disembodied "I" of Descartes and Locke

Neglect of the sensate body becomes most evident in the Cartesian "I" in which, disembodied and detached from the outside world, as though cloistered alone in a stove-heated room near Ulm on the Danube, Descartes could come to comprehend the world purely by the mental power of judgment.[85] For Descartes, self-consciousness, and therefore selfhood, resides in the human self-awareness of thinking. Thinking sets the

[82] Brown, *Restoration of Reason*, 85-86.

[83] Brown, *Restoration of Reason*, 87. Brown rightly notes, "It is of course, possible to adapt the method to the object as does Aristotle. But this involves using different methods for different objects, and the moderns insist on one method for all" (Ibid., 87n1).

[84] Ibid., 96.

[85] Rene Descartes, "Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence," in *Descartes: The Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-19, see Rule 9.

human apart from other existing matter, for thought is self-contained and has no extension as does material objects. The mind differs altogether from the body, for the body as material object can be divided into parts, whereas the mind is indivisible. All ideas, even those of the self and God, have their formal basis in the mind.[86]

The "I" cut off from the phenomena and detached from the physical world stands as it were a disembodied eye in which sight becomes an operation of the mind. Such an epistemological enterprise prioritizes mind and sight over the other senses; understanding the mind (sight) as capable of perceiving the primary qualities of an object, qualities that are quantifiable, while the body (senses) appreciates only secondary qualities such as odor, texture and taste. The bodily senses, like the unfaithful spouse, fall forever under the queer eye of suspicion, for they cannot be trusted, forever risking pollution of the visual perceptions of primary qualities.[87] True knowledge must be sought, according to Descartes, by observers "fixing their eyes on a single point to acquire through practice the ability to make perfect distinctions between things, however minute and delicate."[88] Thus, predicated on sight as an objective means of discovering the external world, objects fill the role of recordable evidence that allows the mind to make sense of visual

[86] See Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 117-118. For a discussion of Descartes' ambivalence towards the body, see Stephen Voss, "Descartes: Heart and Soul," in *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, ed. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173-196; Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 75-78.

[87] See Rene Descartes, "Meditation on First Philosophy," Meditation II, in Rene Descartes, *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 107-112. For a reading of Descartes' Meditations, see John Carriero, *Between Two Worlds: A Reading of Descartes's Meditations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). For an analysis of Descartes' method of inquiry, see Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), primarily 199-238.

[88] Descartes, "Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence," 9-10.

perception in a rational unbiased manner. Serious implications follow from so drastic a dichotomy however, the notion of sight as an operation of the mind, separate from a function of the body and indifferent to context, led inevitably to the idea of observation as an objective, neutral, and detached activity, as opposed to an active engagement with the object of investigation. By arguing that mental acts have no inherent relation to physical acts Descartes set the course for the separation of the mind from the body, the intellectual from the sensual, and the seer from the seen.

It may be assumed that the rationalism of Descartes lends itself more readily to notions of a disembodied "I" than does Locke's empiricism which grounds its claims in experience. While Locke did deny the Cartesian notion of innate ideas in need of no further clarification, he does, nevertheless, ground the existence of the self in immediate self-awareness. Identity, according to Locke, rests on conscious awareness of the self over time. Unlike Descartes, however, Locke insists that personal identity cannot consist in sameness of substance—in the case of Descartes it was soul substance—because conscious awareness of the present self with the past is what constitutes personal identity.[89] Following in similar fashion to Plato, the Lockean notion of the self is an immaterial and immutable agent detached from and independent of any relationship to the material body or world. Thus, personal identity, in Lockean terms, has a psychological rather than a metaphysical basis.

The dominant epistemological traditions of the modern period, with their insistence on a single method centered in the mind of the perceiving subject, led

[89] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 449, 456.

inevitably to the absence and fragmentation of the body. Thus, talk about propositions, logical relations, truth conditions, concepts, and cognitive meaning dominate modern philosophical and theological discourse, but little gets mentioned of the real flesh and blood of bodily being-in-the-world.[90] Contemporary research refers to this neglect as the absent body.[91] While the body may have experienced an absence, as research suggests, it did not altogether disappear, for thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Michele Foucault re-membered the fragmented body by confronting the cognitivist and mechanistic presuppositions of previous thinkers. The works of these thinkers refocused the discussion to the relationship of the person to the world, thus marking a paradigmatic shift which would unite again the cerebral and the sensual.

[90] Mark Johnson, "What Makes a Body?" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 22 (2008): 159.

[91] See Farnell, "Moving Bodies, Acting Selves," 345-346; Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES: EMBODIMENT AS A PAPRADIGM

The previous chapter points out how diverse and ambivalent attitudes toward the body in pre-modern thought, including reformation attempts to eliminate the sensual aspects of religious practice, fed into the modern notion of the autonomous, rational, disembodied self of Cartesian dualism. This Cartesian approach offered the Church a buttress against the rising pressures of modern skepticism by grounding certainty in the mental judgment of the knowing subject.[1] Such a methodological approach came at a cost to the study of religious and spiritual life, however, for subsequent developments of the Cartesian model afforded little to no role for the human body in shaping or explaining religious and spiritual experience. In the Cartesian model all knowledge, including knowledge of God and spiritual experience derives solely from cognitive processes, thus human persons come to be perceived in terms of believing, disembodied minds.[2] Consequently, religious discourse tends to pay little attention to human material

[1] Vasquez, *More Than Belief,* 43.

[2] Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13.

embeddedness such as embodiment, emplacement, cultural productions, and the political and economic conditions that shape human perceptions of the world.[3]

Embodiment, Knowledge, and Practice

Failure to adequately account for ways in which material practices facilitate understanding, reinforce values, and form meaning leads to a serious disconnect between belief and practice. In such a case, religious belief—understood in terms of cognitive appropriation of a body of doctrine—comes to define the essence of Christian life. While religious practice—understood as mere representation of already formed beliefs—plays the supportive role of evidencing or expressing beliefs. Likewise, spirituality becomes a matter of the inner life, in which case, attending to the spiritual life means separation from the material realities of this life, thus leading to a separation of "knowing" from "doing." Consequently, questions concerning the nature and status of material practices such as church rites and rituals have become contested issues subsequent to the debates of the Long Reformation.[4] Fueled by the modern insistence on a purely intellectualist or cognitivist approach, Protestantism experienced a paradigmatic shift in thinking about the formative role of religious rites and ritual practices. Thus, in much of modern Protestantism rites lose the status of real actions and become nothing more than representations, in other words, merely a means of symbolic communication.[5]

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[3] McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 13; Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 43.

[4] See for instance Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[5] McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 34.

Historian Edward Muir has demonstrated convincingly that the "Long Reformation" marks a revolution in ritual theory in which the old ritual privileging of practice gets replaced by the new ritual privileging of cognition.[6] Regarding ritual practice, Robertson Smith notes, the Western Church understands ritual as "important only in connection with its interpretation" and the study of religion "has meant mainly the study of Christian beliefs, and instruction has habitually begun with creed, religious duties being presented to the learner as flowing from dogmatic truths he is taught to accept."[7] This paradigmatic shift marks a turning point in which emphasis on bodily ritual practices get eclipsed by the priority of right belief within a text-centered cognitivist approach which focuses primarily on preaching and teaching. Consequently, the ways in which bodily practices shape and form an understanding of spirituality gets lost or neglected. In response to this dominantly text-centered, doctrinal, and cognitive approach comes the call for a more contextual, material, and dynamic understanding of religious beliefs and spiritual practices.[8] Embodiment offers a methodological perspective through which a serious consideration of the ways in which material practices and embeddedness comes to form and inform understandings of spirituality.

Embodiment as a Paradigm

Forms of embodiment serve as a means to (re)member the fragmented body produced by modern thought and to correct the misunderstanding of the relation of body

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[6] Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 7.

[7] William Robertson Smith, "The Study of the Religion of the Semites," in *Approaches to the Study of Religion: Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 155.

[8] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 253.

to mind and body to world. Embodiment does not refer to the body as such, it does not so much refer to enfleshment; rather, the term intends to describe the general habits, techniques, or types of *habitus* characteristic of bodies within particular times and places.[9] Embodiment refers to the sets of practices that constitute individual bodies in a particular context; bodies that are always affected by social factors. In other words, bodies mediate our relationship to the surrounding world, as Merleau-Ponty claims, "The body is our general medium for having a world."[10] Thus, situated on the level of experience, embodiment describes the ways in which "making sense" and "understanding" take place in a pre-reflexive, even pre-objective, but not pre-cultural way.[11] Embodiment precedes objectivation and representation, therefore, and describes a way of being-in-the-world, thus embodiment becomes the means by which the dualities of subject-object, cognition-emotion, and mind-body are collapsed.[12]

Embodiment can serve as a paradigm, or consistent methodological perspective, by which to study spirituality. Such a methodological approach begins with the postulate that the body serves as the cognitive ground of culture.[13] Returning the body and bodily practices to the center of discussions on "making sense" allows for serious consideration

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[9] Mellor and Shilling, *Re-forming the Body*, 6.

[10] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (Routledge: London, 1962), 146.

[11] Thomas J. Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," *Ethos* 18:1 (March 1990): 9-10.

[12] Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 276.

[13] A detailed analysis of the body as the cognitive ground of culture can be found in Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Johnson's argument should be distinguished from that of Csordas who offers an analysis of the body as the existential ground of culture, see Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology."

of all aspect of bodily being. It allows for a serious investigation of the role of the senses and emotions in both forming and informing spirituality.

Collapsing the Hierarchies of Dualistic Structures

To collapse the dichotomies of spiritual-material, sacred-profane, and subject-object should not be understood to imply erasing difference, or to reduce them to the same; rather, it means collapsing the illegitimate hierarchy often ascribed within dualistic categories, thus allowing both sides an equal voice within dialogue. Dualisms always present a problem of delineation, for the ability to determine clear lines of demarcation proves illusive. Even more to the point, Derrida challenges the very logic of either/or dualisms, arguing that neither side of the binary opposition can exist without the other, for they are both interdependent and related.[14] Likewise, Vivian Burr argues, "to give anything an identity, to say what it is, is necessarily also to say what it is not. In this sense, presence contains absence. That is, to say that a quality is present depends upon implying what is absent."[15]

The functional purpose dualisms serve in providing the ability to conceptually communicate different spheres of human existence makes their use necessary, but the illegitimate prioritizing of one side to the neglect of the other proves problematic. Historically, the clear delineation of the mind from the body, the spiritual from the material, and the sacred from the profane, has had the debilitating effect of removing God, and spiritual life in general, from the everyday routines and practices of being-in-

[14] See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 351-370.

[15] Vivien Burr, *An Introduction to Social Construction* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 73.

the-world. Returning to the material embeddedness of everyday life, therefore, becomes a necessary condition for developing a biblical spirituality.

(Re)Membering the Body

A broad materialist response to the disembodied "I" of Cartesian dualism appeared quickly. The idea that the true immaterial "self" existed apart from and independent of the material body would not go unchallenged. Early responses came from such thinkers as Hobbes, Malebranche, Leibniz, and Spinoza, all of whom address the human condition in more unified and materialist terms. Each of these thinkers identify problems with separating the mind from the body and raise serious questions concerning the relationship between mind and body. Nevertheless, the human person was treated in isolation leaving a further issue to be addressed, that of the relationship of embodied agent and world.

Friedrich Nietzsche proves most influential in laying the groundwork for an investigation into the relationship between agent and world. Nietzsche's attempt at an embodied non-reductive materialist response to Cartesian dualism set in motion a line of thinking critical of forms of internalism that privilege the mind as the autonomous sphere of inquiry. Neitzsche's work would influence thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, who in turn influenced Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and together these thinkers brought about a renewed interest in the embodied nature of being-in-the-world. Cumulatively their work has evidenced that a privileging of the mind to the neglect of the body makes it difficult

"to foreground the external manifestations of religion" such as embodiment, emplacement, and the performative aspects of religious practice.[16]

Nietzsche: The Embodied Self

Nietzsche critiques traditional Western metaphysics for what he perceives as a nihilistic, body despising and life-denying dualism of a true and an apparent world. His writings offer a resistance to the traditional bifurcation of the spheres of felt and imagined experience, or what in the West has been distinguished by body and mind.[17] Addressing his reader through the mouth of his prophet, Nietzsche has Zarathustra proclaim, "I wish now to speak to those despisers of the body."[18] The despisers of the body are those who hold to the traditional Platonic-Christian metaphysics dominant in western culture. Traditional western metaphysics, Nietzsche contends, relocates the plenitude of this world to an ideal realm in which knowledge, truth, and a unified ahistorical self can be accessed solely by the powers of mental judgment. This metaphysical framework undergirds Christian teaching, denies the body, and as Nietzsche understands it, reduces the role of the body to nothing more than mere signification.[19] Against the representational epistemology such a metaphysical framework entails, Nietzsche offers a

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[16] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 59-60.

[17] Kristen Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment: Discerning Bodies and Non-dualism* (New York: Sate University of New York Press, 2006), 2.

[18] Nietzsche traces traditional western metaphysics back to Plato and argues that Christianity embraces Platonism's dualistic structure of reality. He also traces the rise of what he refers to as modernity's "reactive nihilism" to Christianity. For Nietzsche's critique of Cartesian dualism see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 61-63.

[19] For an informative discussion of Nietzsche's critique of traditional metaphysics see Andrea Rehberg, "The Overcoming of Physiology," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 23 (Spring 2002): 39-50.

praxis-oriented philosophy in which practice becomes the role of the body; thus, Zarathustra can claim the body "does not say 'I' but performs 'I'."[20]

Nietzsche conceives of a variety of arrangements configuring integrated relations between mind and body.[21] The body serves as vehicle for the historical and social manifestations of will to power. The notion of an ahistorical self proves to be nothing more than the transitory construction of the body's will to power asserting itself in a given context.[22] In creative fashion he infiltrates the language of metaphysics in order to use it against itself.[23] Nietzsche employs the language of physiology in order to explicate the will to power and he employs the language of medical physiology as a way of describing the body as sick, as a way of referring to the situation of decadence brought on by adherence to traditional dualistic metaphysics. The use of physiological terms such as heart, breath, exhaustion, confusion, joy and others, are employed as ways of contesting body-soul dualism. In other words, Nietzsche teaches a thoroughly embodied notion of the self: "But the awakened, the enlightened man says: I am body entirely and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body."[24]

The human being as material body is projected as a part of and involved in the contest of forces that give rise to material becoming, as such Zarathustra proclaims,

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[20] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 62.

[21] Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, 2.

[22] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 53.

[23] Rehberg, "The Overcoming of Physiology," 40.

[24] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 61.

"Thus the body goes through history, evolving and battling."[25] The thinking of will to power takes the body as its methodological starting point, not in order to establish a new metaphysical ground; rather, the idea of multiple physiological becomings undermines ontologies founded on the assumption of the self as a unitary and transcendental point of reference and identity.[26] The body and the self are culturally and historically situated artifacts, products of contested forces of power relations, interests, and desires. The constitution of the self involves a reciprocal shaping occurring among the ideational, psychosomatic, and the socio-physical.[27] The ongoing reciprocal movement across these three planes highlights the social influence in the formation of meaning which always includes the body.[28] As such, knowledge becomes the product of the embodied self in relation to the world and such knowledge is always perspectival.

By identifying the role of the body in the formation of the concept of self and the formation of meaning, Nietzsche returns the focus of discussion to the historical and cultural relationship of embodied agent to the world. The body carries with it the history of its disciplining; it has a genealogy tied to its cultural and historical situatedness. The Christian religion plays an important role in the genealogy of the body for, as Nietzsche understands it, Christianity offers a way of escaping the unpredictable and ever changing

[25] Ibid., 101.

[26] Rehberg, "The Overcoming of Physiology," 40. See also Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, 1-6; and Christian J. Emden, *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 91-99.

[27] See Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, 6-7. Brown refers to these three constitutions as self, conscience, and corporal punishment.

[28] Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, 7.

character of nature.[29] Rather than embrace the anxieties of a precarious earthly existence, Christianity made a way of escape by denying the body's will to power and creating an ahistorical self and a transcendent God who ensures stability, absolute truth, and predictability. In this sense Nietzsche understands Christianity as playing a pivotal role in the rise of modern thought.[30]

Nietzsche's understanding of the history of Christian thought seems too narrow to do the tradition any real justice and his reading of Christianity's role in the rise of modern thought appears too simplistic. Nietzsche does, nevertheless, provide the groundwork for an analysis of the relationship of agent and world and he does bring a renewed interest in discussions of the body and its role. Nietzsche's key points remain worthy of consideration: The language of traditional Platonic-Christian metaphysics elevated intellect over body thereby diminishing the importance and status of the body in forming a concept of the self and in forming meaning. In Nietzsche's writings there is a playful and strategic inversion of the two, a reversal of values occurs in which the status of the body is elevated over that of the intellect.[31] The body and mind get conflated, but Nietzsche also distinguishes them by interposing the body between the forces of the external world and the concepts of the internal mind.[32] This conflation allows the body to unite the mind and world in a non-dualistic manner while avoiding a reductive materialism or spiritualism; thus, the interpretive status of body as metaphor assists in

[29] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 54.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Brown, *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, 17.

[32] Ibid.

avoiding reductive materialism, idealism, and metaphysical dualism.[33] It is by bringing body, mind, and world together in a non-reductive, non-dualistic way that Nietzsche offers a means of understanding the importance of embodiment to meaning-making and identity formation. Nietzsche's emphasis on the relationship between agent and world set the groundwork for further inquiry into the ways in which embodiment both forms and informs our understandings of spirituality.

Martin Heidegger: The Historicized and Emplaced Self

Heidegger responds to the decontextualized and disembodied concept of subjectivity predominant in much of the theology, philosophy, and science of his day by proposing a historicized and embedded self. The lack of a leading fore-structure marks the fundamental failure of the decontextualized and disembodied approach to subjectivity, according to Heidegger.[34] The fore-structure describes Dasein's[35] unique interpretive tendency which comes "be-fore" any propositional judgment concerning the nature of the objects of experience.[36] Opposed to the idea that the self relates to the world in strictly intellectual terms, Heidegger understands the self's relation to the world in terms of care and praxis. Prior to any theoretical understanding of an object, arrived at by

[33] Ibid. For a careful analysis suggesting that Nietzsche's writing tends toward a reductive biologism see Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[34] For Heidegger's discussion of the fore-structure, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: Sate University of New York Press, 2010), primarily Section 32, especially pp. 145-147.

[35] *Dasein* is a German word meaning "being there." Heidegger uses it to refer to the experience of being particular to human beings. It offers the notion of embodiment and emplacement that overcomes the decontextualized subjectivity of Cartesian dualism.

[36] Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 93. Grondin draws his analysis primarily from Sections 31-33 of Heidegger's *Being and Time.*

abstracting it from everyday life in order to determine its fundamental essence, there is the manner in which Dasein relates to the object in everyday use. The fundamental character of Heidegger's notion of fore-structure is care and praxis in which Dasein transforms its everyday encounter and use of objects into a meaningful life world. Meaning and self-identity arise out of "a comportment toward beings" and is always under threat of being concealed by propositional judgments.[37] Meaning arises out of an embedded and historicized relationship in which Dasein discloses meaning to itself within historical horizons.[38] In this way, the world should not be understood as an object made intelligible only when the "I" predicates something of it; rather, the world is there prior to thought, there as already lived.

Heidegger seeks to de-structure the subject-object schema in an attempt to rethink Dasein. The human person should not be understood as subject standing over against the world as object, rather Dasein should be understood as already being-in the world, where the "being-in" defines and describes a phenomenological relationship. This pre-reflective and pre-theoretical form of access, Heidegger refers to as understanding, and should not be taken as a specific act of cognition.[39] As Grondin points out, this new conception of understanding refers primarily to a way of existing, or a fundamental mode of being by which people cope with and find their way around in the world.[40] This pre-theoretical form of access defines a certain familiarity that life already has of itself; it describes a

[37] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 71; Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 93.

[38] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 71.

[39] Theodore Kisiel, *Heidegger's Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretive Signposts* (New York: Continuum Books, 2002), 176.

[40] Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 93.

"spontaneous experience of experience."[41] Yet, as a mode of being, understanding remains for the most part implicit, for it does not need conscious thematization as people are always already engrossed within it.[42] Understanding then marks a fundamental moment belonging to Dasein's existence, a moment that somehow involves the notion of possibility. This bringing together of understanding and possibility occurs because understanding has the character of projection, and Heidegger refers to this projective character of the understanding as sight.[43] Dasein's being-in-the-world constitutes a being-towards in which the being-towards the world serves as the referential totality of involvement in which entities within the world comes to be understood. That is, it marks a being-towards the "for-the-sake-of-which," constituting a reflexivity giving rise to a self-understanding. For Heidegger then, meaning-making can only take place within a relationship to the world and other beings in which subject and object are co-constituted within a reflexive relation of understanding, projection, and possibility.

Heidegger brings together the notions of understanding, projection, and possibility by showing that the projecting of the understanding has the possibility of developing itself, or referring back to itself.[44] This notion of reflexivity, Heidegger describes as interpretation, and within interpretation the understanding "becomes itself,"

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 94. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 32, 144-149.

[43] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 31, 142.

[44] For a discussion of Heidegger's notion of projection see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 31, especially pp. 140-142. See also Reiner Schurmann, "Heidegger's *Being and Time*" in *On Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. Steven Levine (New York: Routledge, 2008), 86-89; Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 49-73.

hence the two are intimately connected.[45] A situation now obtains in which this reflexivity allows the understanding to project itself upon other entities, as well as, upon itself. There will accordingly be different kinds of interpretations, such as the interpretation of objects in the world and interpretation of the self.[46] Thus, Heidegger offers a new conception of seeing in which factical life experience involves and includes both the "how" and the "what."

Heidegger insists on maintaining the dynamic interplay that takes place between Dasein and its world, he simply forbids the separation of the knowing subject and the known object, for life experience simply cannot be reduced to a process of "taking cognizance of."[47] For this reason, Heidegger employs a methodological tool, namely formal indication, by which he intends to turn the interpreter's gaze from an explanation of what it means to exist towards an understanding of how human beings relate to their experiences.[48] To do this he suggests that facticity includes the enactment of meaning or understanding within a tripartite structure: the content-sense, or the "what" of a life tendency; the relational-sense, or the "how" of a tendency; and the enactment-sense, or

[45] For a brief discussion of interpretation in Heidegger see Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 96-98.

[46] Heidegger's discussion of interpretation is found in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Section 32.

[47] Jean Greisch, "Heidegger's Methodological Principles for Understanding Religious Phenomena" in *A Companion to Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. By S.J. McGrath and Andrzej Wiercinski (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 137.

[48] For a discussion of Heidegger's use of formal indication see Lars Bruun, "Back to the Future: Reading Heidegger Reading Paul," *The Bible and Critical Theory*, 5 (2009): 2-3; also for an extended analysis of formal indication see Hent de Vries, "Formal Indications" in *MLN*, 113: 3 (April 1998): 635-688; Sean J. McGrath, "Formal Indication, Irony, and the Risk of Saying Nothing" in *A Companion to Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. S.J. McGrath and Andrzej Wiercinski (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 179-205.

the enactment of meaning.[49] It follows then, that the enactment of meaning presupposed by attending to the manner in which the subject of experience relates to the experience can only be formally indicated, for the philosophical concept acts as a guide, an indicator and nothing more.[50] Heidegger's analysis begins with Dasein already in a situation, the enactment-sense, which then determines both the relation-sense and content-sense.[51] The effect of this crucial shift, as McGrath points out, is a radical de-centering of intentionality, a dislodging of the ego from its constitutive transcendentality.[52]

The importance of Heidegger to the discussion of the relationship of spirituality to embodiment follows from his insistence that "Dasein itself has a being-in-space of its own," as a result of its bodily nature.[53] Unlike other objects, Dasein does not merely occupy a position in space; rather, Dasein appropriates the objects that are given by its embodied nature thus entering a relationship in which meaning can be made. The life-world occupied by Dasein is inextricably social and, as such, the social processes that make up this world have the power to shape the subject through situated practices that serve to shape identity and form meaning.

Merleau-Ponty: Embodiment as Methodological Principle

Heidegger grounds the event of understanding in a pre-reflective, reflexive relation of subject to its object in which the two are co-constituted and meaning arises

[49] McGrath, "Formal Indication," 181.

[50] Bruun, "Back to the Future," 4.

[51] McGrath, "Formal Indication," 181.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 56.

from within a lived experience of being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty puts flesh to Heidegger's theory by emphasizing the embodied nature of Dasein. The pre-reflective experience raised by Heidegger and developed further by Merleau-Ponty simply insists that prior to assigning meaning to an object the subject engages it on a bodily level. This embodied rootedness of being-in-the-world together with a deep pre-reflective involvement with the surroundings marks an essential feature of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.[54]

The principle duality of concern to Merleau-Ponty is that of subject-object which arises within the domain of perception. In an attempt to collapse this duality Merleau-Ponty invokes embodiment as a methodological principle.[55] Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, the body serves as a "setting in relation to the world," and consciousness serves as the means by which the body projects itself in the world.[56] In this way, the body cannot be understood as distinct from or in interaction with an opposed principle of mind. Embodied beings engage with the surrounding environment using all the body's sensory system in such a way that every act of meaning making becomes a lived-out, rather than a thought-out experience. As Vivian Sobchack aptly notes, the objective body is "always also lived out subjectively as 'my' body, diacritically invested and active in making sense and meaning in and of the world."[57] In this sense Dasein can be thought of as an

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[54] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. William Cobb (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

[55] See Cordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," 8.

[56] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 303.

[57] Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh" in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 60.

embodied "agent-at-grips-with-things" so that sense-making arises out of acting in the world.[58]

The relationship of body and object of perception indicates that visual engagement with the world takes place at the boundary between a body and its surroundings, described by Merleau-Ponty as flesh.[59] Flesh is not a substance existing in-between the body and the world, but should be understood in terms of function. As Merleau-Ponty points out, "The thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication."[60] Flesh functions as a continuous bond, or fabric of experience, in which body and thing interconnect in the event of living-in-the-world.[61] Merleau-Ponty attempts, with this conception of flesh, to create a relationship of connection between the body and the world so as to support his thesis of the indivisibility of subject and object. The two are not ontological opposites, as in the Cartesian model, but are subsumed within the same horizon because, 'he who sees is of it (flesh) and is in it.'[62] Merleau-Ponty's thesis is aims at rejecting "the age-old assumption that puts the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the

[58] Stephen A. Tyler, "Embodied Agency" in *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Essays*, ed. by H. Pietersma (Washington, DC: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 1989), 7.

[59] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphosnso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 135.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Olga Belova, "The Event of Seeing: A Phenomenological Perspective on Visual Sense-Making" in *Culture and Organization*, 12 (June 2006), 97.

[62] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 100.

world and the body in the seer as in a box."[63] Rather, as he states it, a mutual relating occurs in which body and world are co-constituted and the body acts as a "general power of inhabiting all the environments which the world contains."[64]

The significance of Merleau-Ponty's work to the study of spirituality arises out of an emphasis on the formative nature of human lived experiences. The co-constitutional relationship between subject and object, the mutual formative powers of the individual and the social, evidences the fact that they are inseparably connected prior to any act of objectification. Embodiment then becomes the methodological principle for collapsing the subject-object duality; likewise, physical-spiritual and body-soul dualisms can be collapsed using the same methodological principle of embodiment. The elements comprising these dualities should not be understood as distinct from one another, only interacting as opposed principles, but are inextricable, co-constitutional, and mutually formative and informative. Thus, the habits carried about in the body, habits originating in and arising out of lived experience in the world, both form and inform a sense of the self and its place in the world.

Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty all three bring formidable challenges to the disembodied and decontextualized subjectivity of Cartesian philosophy. Their emphasis on constructed and contextual knowledge requires thinking seriously about the body and its material embeddedness. The implications of such a move prove crucial, for subsequent developments spell out the presence of the body in social, political, moral, and spiritual life. Subsequently, by the last few decades of the twentieth century, the body

[63] Ibid., 138.

[64] Ibid., 311.

became the locus of social, religious, political, cultural and economic interest and has become the key site of social and political intervention.[65] This renewed interest in and focus on the body has led the sociologist Bryan Turner to conclude that contemporary society is a "somatic society" in which political and personal issues are problematized within the body and are expressed through the body.[66]

The Somatic Turn

The scholarly attention given to the human body at the end of the twentieth century bordered on a cultural obsession. In the first edition of Peter Burke's *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, the historian Roy Porter describes the history of the body as an ignored and neglected topic.[67] Porter accounts for the neglect of the body in terms of a deep seated disparagement of the somatic in western culture.[68] Only a decade later, in the second edition of the book, Porter claims that body history has become the "historiographical dish of the day."[69] While Porter rightly identifies a significant increase in scholarly attention to the body, Roger Cooter points out, it was not primarily body history that captured the interest of scholars; rather, it was the notion of a historicized

[65] See Philip Hancock, *The Body, Culture and Society: An Introduction* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), 1.

[66] Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 1.

[67] Roy Porter, "History of the Body" in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 1st ed., edited Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 212, 226.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Roy Porter, "History of the Body Reconsidered" in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd ed., edited Peter Burke (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 236.

body.[70] Following the work of Michel Foucault, who framed the body as non-reductive, non-essentialist and politically invested, the register of concern shifted away from a history of the body as such and towards a cultural history of the body as embedded in and conditioned by its material situation.

Foucault and Somaticized Culture

The turn to the body gained momentum following the work of Foucault, largely due to the influence Foucault's work has had on feminist, race, and gay studies. Foucault draws awareness to the body as the site of political power struggles and, as culturally constituted, the subject of a cultural history. He further raises an awareness of the complex relationship existing between power and the human body. Modern power, in Foucault's estimation, comes to be constituted through discursive practices operative in and upon the human body. This condition arises from the desire to learn from nature in order to dominate it and in so doing gain mastery over others, which becomes a key value of modernity.[71] As a result, modernity witnesses a reordering of the relationship of culture and nature in which nature, including the body, becomes something to be controlled and disciplined.[72] Just as nature becomes subjected to human control and exploitation, so too, human embodiment, emotions, and desires have been civilized by formal modes of conduct.

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[70] Roger Cooter, "The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal" in *ARBOR* 743 (May-June 2010): 393-394.

[71] See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Concept of Enlightenment" in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Verso Classics, 1997), 3-42.

[72] Hancock, *The Body, Culture and Society*, 2.

Foucault understands these power structures as both shaping and being shaped by bodily knowledge and practices.[73] The body itself, according to Foucault, is shaped by "a great many distinct regimes."[74] Thus, the body becomes central in the play of power, according to Foucault, and power "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives."[75] In Foucault's estimation, the body cannot be reduced to a fixed essence; rather, identity and meaning are fashioned through the body or biological life itself. This non-reductive, non-essentialist, socially constructed view of the body underpins much of the widespread cultural agenda of the body in the twentieth century.[76]

Rationality and Sensuality

Following Foucault's non-essentialist approach to the body, a world disgruntled with the inadequacy of rationality turns to sensuality for answers and, as such, modernity's devaluing and suspicion of the sensual becomes the focus of postmodern scholarly critique. The modern priority of mind over body becomes a major source of contention for its neglect of the important role the body plays in making sense of the world. The modern separation of the physical body from knowledge—in which seeing gets conflated with knowing, such that, sight becomes the means for the transport of knowledge from the external world to the inner world of the mind—becomes a contested

[73] Cooter, "The Turn of the Body," 395.

[74] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1971), 153.

[75] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 39.

[76] Cooter, "The Turn of the Body," 396-399.

notion. In the postmodern context persons are no longer conceived of as disembodied rationalist beings, since there can be no unmediated access to knowledge. The senses can no longer be denied a role in the act of sense making, for the entire person, body and mind, engages and experiences its world on a bodily level. Human persons acquire information through their bodies, as Constance Classen points out, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting are activities which "make sense" of the world.[77] The senses provide an immediate connection to the world; they create a sense of intimacy and belonging that can never be achieved by a disembodied rationality.

The idea of the senses creating an intimacy and feeling of belonging to the world should not be viewed negatively however, for the bodily senses can open up the natural world to the sacred as a lived manifestation of God's presence. The sacred is experienced through the sensate body as a gift from God, not a thought out and distant gift, but an immediately realizable and lived out gift. Sensing the sacred makes possible the presence of God while the traditional western tendency to deny the senses, to label them profane, removes the sacred from immediate reality.[78] Modern Protestantism's suspicion of the senses, and the bifurcating of the world into distinct categories of sacred and profane, undergirds modernity's retreat from the sacred and promotion of purely cognitivist forms of knowing.

It must be acknowledged, however, that Christianity's longstanding suspicion of the bodily senses does have merit, for Scripture serves as a stern warning against the cult

[77] See Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[78] Donald N. Levine, *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 139.

of the sensual. The contemporary cultural obsession with the sensual body has given rise to unhealthy practices that both form and inform personal identity in ways that are counter to the purposes of God and in ways which impede and even degrade spiritual growth. Nevertheless, if the sensual body plays a role in spiritual formation, it cannot be ignored or neglected. For this reason, it becomes imperative for the Church to gain a proper biblical perspective of both the body and spirituality.

PART TWO

RESTOR(Y)ING THE BODY FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

THE BODY AND SPIRITUALITY: INTERIORITY AND PRACTICE

The previous chapter points out how responses to the autonomous and disembodied self of Descartes gives rise to a body centered non-reductive materialism. The spirit-body dichotomy and ambivalence toward the body in strands of Christian and modern thought neglect the important role of the body in understanding the world and one's place in it. This bracketing off the body leaves religion to understand human beings as believing, disembodied minds, thus neglecting the influence and role of material conditions and practices.[1] The materialist response provides an alternative to this disembodied internalism and idealism by shifting the focus back to the historicity, facticity, embodiedness, and embeddedness of everyday human existence as the inescapable conditions for the construction of selfhood and the making of meaning.[2] Returning the body to the center of discussions of spirituality, and considering the ways in which material conditions and bodily practices are both formative and informative, marks important features of this shift. It becomes important for the study of Christian

[1] McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 13.

[2] Vasquez, *More Than Belief*, 59.

spirituality, therefore, to determine how the body and its role in constructing identity and making meaning are to be understood. Now that the material grounds for theorizing about spiritual formation have been established, it becomes possible to move forward in developing an understanding of the body sufficient to inform spirituality.

Defining the Body in the Social Sciences

Defining the body proves no easy task, for as any perusal of the literature demonstrates, the term appears polysemic. At its most basic level the word "body" denotes the physical flesh and can refer to what remains after a person dies. As Justo Gonzalez points out, "at a funeral we say that the body may be viewed, or the body lies in state."[3] Alternatively, the word can be used in an entirely different way to refer to the person, such as in the saying, "what is a body to do?"[4] Bynum suggests that the term "body" has multiple referents and lacks a well-established understanding across academic disciplines.[5] Lacking any set of established structures or behaviors, the term, at times, refers to biological or social limit or placement such as physical organs or gender, race, or class. At other times, however, it can refer to lack of limits such as desire, potentiality, or identity.[6] McGuire points out that the body often gets defined reductively in terms of agency or matter.[7] Agency, according to McGuire, refers to the socially constructed body as an active persona within society, so that loss of agency, by whatever means, implies an

[3] Justo L. Gonzalez, "What Is a Body?" *The Living Pulpit* (April-June 2006): 4.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body?" 3-8.

[6] Ibid., 5.

[7] McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 284.

assault upon the self. Matter, she notes, denotes the biological body which becomes the grounding for bodily experience in the world.[8] McGuire seeks to avoid reductive models in her own work by reconceptualizing mind, body, and society as a deeply intertwined and interdependent set of phenomena.[9] The complexity in defining the body indicates that any reductive definition will fall short of doing justice to its biological, social, cultural, phenomenological and spiritual dimensions and prove of little value in understanding the role of the body in spiritual formation. A much broader conception of embodiment proves necessary to understanding the important place the body occupies in all of these dimensions.

The Multidimensional Body

Mark Johnson's research on embodiment proves most helpful in identifying the complex and multidimensional functions of embodied experience. Johnson identifies five interwoven dimensions necessary to any definition of human embodiment.[10] The most obvious understanding of the body derives from the commonsense fact that it exists as a "biological organism" composed of flesh and blood. As such, the body makes possible an orientation to the world since the world extends out from the body and is oriented in relation to the body. The various systems of the body working together, Johnson notes, "makes possible the qualities, images, feelings, emotions, and thought patterns that

[8] Ibid., 284.

[9] Ibid., 285.

[10] See Mark Johnson, "What Makes a Body?" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 22 (2008): 164-166; Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chapter 12.

constitute the ground of our meaning and understanding."[11] As a biological unit the body consists of multiple biological functions working together and therefore cannot be reduced to any single function. Nor, does the body exist in isolation, however, and as a functioning biological organism it interacts on several levels with its environment. Given the constitutive relationship between body and environment it proves impossible to reduce embodiment to mere biological function since the body is defined by and in relation to other things.

The interrelation between organism and environment requires that the body also be conceived, Johnson suggests, as an "ecological body" incapable of existing independent of its environment. In this sense, the body and its environment are understood as co-constitutive; there can be no organism-environment duality, as though each brings its own pre-given structure and identity into the interaction.[12] The meaning and identity of each become determined within the relational structures they both share. It quickly becomes evident, however, that the mutual formative functions of biological organism and external environment are not enough to exhaust the meaning of the body. More goes on within embodied existence than mere organism-environment interaction, for bodily being-in-the-world involves a series of complex reflections on experiences.

The reflexive awareness of daily lived bodily experiences defines, what Johnson labels, the "phenomenological body." The phenomenological dimension describes the tactile and kinesthetic functions of embodiment; it describes the "living, moving, feeling,

[11] Johnson, "What Makes a Body?" 164. For a discussion of body schema as a system of sensory-motor functions operating on a pre-cognitive level, see Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

[12] Ibid.

pulsing body of our being-in-the-world."[13] This phenomenological aspect of embodiment marks the body's awareness of itself through proprioception, the feeling of bodily posture and orientation, and through kinesthetic sensations of bodily movement.[14] There becomes through this embodied experience, then, an awareness of internal bodily states in which feelings and emotions serve the constitutive function of creating a felt sense of self.[15]

This felt sense of self does not take place in isolation, however, for the embodied person exists within social and cultural structures that together play a formative role in making meaning. Johnson refers to the "social body" in an effort to describe the inter-subjective relationships and "coordinations" of experiences that together produce and express social meaning.[16] Bodies develop within and through inter-personal relationships with others and these social relationships become crucial in forming the ways the bodily self gets understood and expressed. Likewise, Johnson describes the "cultural body" in terms of the ways bodies are constituted by shared "cultural artifacts, practices, institutions, rituals, and modes of interaction that transcend and shape any particular body and any particular bodily action."[17] Cultural institutions, practices, and values provide

[13] Ibid., 165. For a detailed discussion of the tactile and kinesthetic function of bodily action, see Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999).

[14] For a discussion of haptic perception, kinesthetic and proprioception in visual studies, see Jennifer Fisher, "Relational Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics," in *Parachute* 87 (July-September 1997): 4-11; Laura Marks, "Video Haptics and Erotics," *Screen* 39:4 (Winter 1998): 331-348.

[15] Johnson, "What Makes a Body?" 165. See also Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

[16] Ibid. See also McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 288-290.

[17] Ibid.

shared structures that influence the development of bodily ways of engaging and making sense of the world.[18]

The value of this contemporary research on the body and embodiment lay in its ability to account for the multidimensional structure of human existence. Each dimension constitutes an appropriate and irreducible level of explanation of embodied being-in-the-world.[19] This proves crucial to overcoming reductive conceptual understandings of the human person that alienate, neglect, or ignore certain dimensions of human existence and experience. Understanding embodiment as the quality of having and being intimately identified with the body in this multidimensional way opens the possibility of developing an approach to spiritual formation that takes serious each of these dimensions.[20] The human endeavor to make sense of bodily and spiritual life simply cannot be reduced to a function of the mind, for as Johnson and others have demonstrated, the mind cannot be extricated from embodiment.

The Body and the Making of Meaning in the Social Sciences

The cumulative research available from social and cultural anthropology, the cognitive sciences, the social sciences, and the social sciences of religion demonstrates that the knowledge the body has of its world gets transmitted primarily through critical apprenticeships, ritual practices, and bodily and spatial practices rather than through

[18] For discussions of the ways in which knowledge is cultivated through bodily practice, see Lock, "Cultivating the Body," 133-135; Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," 5-47.

[19] Johnson, "What Makes a Body?" 167.

[20] McGuire, "Why Bodies Matter," 4.

merely didactic methods.[21] For example, bodily posture, ways of moving, spatial practices, ways of making things, and "practical taxonomies of sensory experience" are all forming and informing functions of embodied practice.[22] In other words, apprenticeship and ritual practice are key ways the body makes sense of the world, they become means to reorient, correct, or rearrange the senses through habitual bodily practice.[23] This research is promising for rediscovering ways to engage spiritual formation.

Following the theoretical shift from structure to process and practice within the social sciences in recent decades, evangelical scholars are increasingly becoming aware of, even sensitized to, notions of embodied perception[24] and bodily *habitus*.[25] Understanding the important ways in which spiritual life is constituted by bodily and spatial practices opens up opportunities to structure these practices into daily routines and worship services in ways that facilitate spiritual growth. The value of this research for Christian spiritual formation resides in its ability to reorient theology and praxis around the role of embodiment in spiritual formation. This necessitates, of course, an understanding of spirituality broad enough to be informed by bodily practice.

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[21] Lawwrence E. Sullivan, "Body Works: Knowledge of the Body in the Study of Religion," *History of Religion* 30 (August 1990): 87-88; Brenda Farnell, "Moving Bodies, Acting Selves," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 346-348; McGuire, "Religion and the Body, 285-290; Csorda, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," 5-47.

[22] Farnell, "Moving Bodies, Acting Selves," 347.

[23] Sullivan, "Body Works," 87.

[24] See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty seeks to collapse the dualism of subject-object through the methodological principle of embodiment.

[25] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Bourdieu's strategy is to collapse the dualities of body-mind, sign-significance, and structure-practice through embodiment by developing the concept of *habitus*.

Rethinking Spirituality with the Social Sciences

A few preliminary remarks are in order. The problems plaguing discussions of spirituality are both old and new. Long standing notions of spirituality as something entirely distinct from and entirely independent of physicality makes any understanding of the daily practice of spirituality impossible. More recent problems arise out of understandings of spirituality as something interior to the human person, private, and entirely individual. The term "spirituality" has been extricated of almost all its biblical meaning in the past few decades. It has come to refer in generic terms to self-actualization and self-transcendence detached from any religious or biblical context. In this generic sense spirituality refers almost entirely to the activity of the human spirit and has all but lost any orientation to the influence of the Holy Spirit and the Church.[26]

Furthermore, contemporary enthusiasm over spirituality reveals an affinity to modern consumerism in which individual taste takes precedence over communal meaning.[27] In twentieth century consumer culture the term spirituality tends to refer more generally to the interior life which need share no connection whatsoever with institutional religion and can be spoken of in terms of "my" spirituality.[28] Christian spirituality, however, if it is to be biblical must not fall prey to such problems; rather, it must focus full attention on the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ through the illuminating power of

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[26] Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3 (Fall 2003): 16.

[27] Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6-7. See also Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[28] Later in this chapter some philosophical problems with limiting spirituality to interiority will be discussed. Chapter 4 will discuss the privatizing of religion and the interiorizing of spirituality as narratives subversive to true biblical spirituality.

the Holy Spirit. Christian spirituality must be reconnected to the New Testament concept of discipleship in which proclamation, service and community membership are key and indispensable elements.[29] Further, the tendency to sever spirituality from bodily practice by stressing detachment, denial, and suspicion of the body and emotions must be avoided. Spirituality must be understood in terms of an active process involving material practices, rather than merely an abstract quality or mere capacity.

Defining Spirituality for Embodied Life

It should first be acknowledged that in an anthropological sense, spirituality, like personality, marks a constitutive characteristic of the human person as such.[30] In this sense, spirituality marks a real sphere of human existence and experience and should be treated as such. In a very practical sense, however, spirituality describes the everyday manner in which persons attend to their spiritual lives.[31] While not attempting a theological anthropology, it must be stated nonetheless, that the human person viewed holistically is constituted of body and spirit. Searching for a useful definition of spirituality must involve both the anthropological reality and the practical necessity of nurturing and living out that reality. Here the work of Sandra Schneiders proves helpful, for Shneiders captures elements of both a theoretical and practical definition.

Spirituality, according to Schnieders, describes the capacity of persons to transcend themselves in love and knowledge in a manner that reaches beyond themselves

[29] Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 10. Chapter 6 will argue that a true biblical spirituality cannot be practiced independent of the believing community.

[30] Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality," 165.

[31] McGuire, "Why Bodies Matter," 2.

in relation to others. In this anthropological sense, all humans are spiritual.[32] More specifically, however, she describes Christian spirituality as a "developed relationality to self, others, world, and the Transcendent."[33] As such, spirituality comes to be understood in terms of an experience of lived reality, both active and passive, in which "conscious involvement in a project" is pursued.[34] The emphasis on the active and passive dimensions of spirituality asserts that while spirituality must be engage in conscious human effort, it cannot be reduced to an act of the human spirit, but also involves the work of the Holy Spirit.

The claim of "conscious involvement in a project" directs spiritual experience away from a temporal feeling of an encounter with the sublime, or other momentary epiphany like episodic events, and places it within an ongoing and coherent approach to life. The project then, according to Schneiders, involves living out a Christ-like life within the context of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit.[35] This life approach defines a practice of "life-integration" which becomes a holistic synthesis of ongoing growth and development pursued by consistent "self-transcendence toward ultimate value."[36] The horizon of ultimate value is the triune God revealed in the person of Christ. Living within this horizon of ultimate value requires relating in an appropriate

[32] Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality," 165.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 167. See also Sandra Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dyer and Mark S. Borrows (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 5-24.

[35] Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality," 6.

[36] Schneiders, "Religion vs. Spirituality," 167.

way to all of reality, thus relating to the whole of reality and to reality as a whole in a Christian manner comes to constitute Christian spirituality.[37]

By employing the concepts of "integration" and "holistic" Schneiders intends to involve the whole person in the process; body and spirit, emotions and reason, as well as, the individual and social dimensions of human existence and experience. This integrated and holistic approach to the study of spirituality marks a major step in the right direction. The Christian spiritual tradition has often obscured the capacity to take seriously the formative influence of human embodiedness and emplacement, but unless the embodied, social, and political dimensions of spiritual experience are taken into account, the Church's vision of the Christian life will be impoverished and inadequate.[38] Drawing on the anthropological reality of human persons as constituted by body and spirit, and taking serious the necessity to nurture and live out that reality, Schneiders develops a definition of spirituality as a purposeful practice and process involving the whole person situated within particular social contexts. This definition of spirituality contests any notion of the spiritual life as purely private and interior.

Spirituality and Interiority

The Christian spiritual tradition has often obscured the capacity to take seriously embodied, social, and political influences on spirituality in part due to a longstanding and pervasive emphasis on the interior life as distinct from the outer bodily and communal

[37] Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality," 6.

[38] Douglas Burton-Christie, "Introduction: Beginnings," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dyer and Mark S. Borrows (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), XXVI.

life.[39] This sentiment is summed up in a letter penned by Thomas Merton to a circle of friends shortly before his death, he wrote: "Our journey is interior; it is a matter of growth, deepening, and ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts."[40] This common understanding of spirituality as an inner journey in the life of the soul continues to be prevalent and persuasive even today.[41] It takes for granted that the term "spiritual" refers to a sphere of human existence distinct from the physical. As Sheldrake reminds us, however, the concept of spirituality comes from the Greek words *pneuma* and *pneumatikos* as used by the Apostle Paul to describe a way of life directed toward and by the Spirit, in contrast to living in ways opposed to the Spirit of God.[42] Rather than a private experience, such as individual devotional or ascetical exercise, spirituality refers to common everyday practices that mark out a way of life.[43]

Reducing spirituality to a matter of private concern presents a problem, as Wade Clark Roof points out, for religion understood as external and institutional practice tends to be denigrated while spirituality understood as interior and private tends to be

[39] For a critique of the notion of the interior life as distinct from bodily life, see Owen C. Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality," *The Journal of Religion* 80:1 (January 2000): 41-60.

[40] Quoted in William A. Shannon, *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 2. Other examples of the emphasis on interiority are *The Interior Castle* of Teresa of Avila and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.

[41] See Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 105.

[42] Philip F. Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dyer and Mark S. Borrows (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 283.

[43] Ibid.

honored.[44] Religious institutions and traditions are no longer perceived as essential to the construction of a sense of self, or meaning more broadly, because the self and meaning are solely the marks of interiority. This sense of interiority as private and individual life would have been foreign to the earliest Christians, as Brown points out, for they inherited from Judaism an intense sense of solidarity between the individual and the community. There existed a perceived danger that retreat into privacy would undermine the promotion of the common good intended in the divine imperative to love and serve one's neighbor. Thus Jewish writers focused on the thoughts of the heart as the core of motivation and intention purposively suggesting that an undivided heart is essential to communal solidarity.[45] Spirituality as lived experience, therefore, understood in terms of practice or project, become inherently social and cannot be reduced to the personal private inner life distinct from and independent of embodiment, community, tradition, and political influences.[46] A lived spirituality encompasses all of these spheres of existence in the act of constructing private and social meaning and solidarity.

Interiority becomes an issue in spirituality due to a longstanding and influential philosophical tradition which tends to divide reality into opposites and then prioritize one side over the other. This inner-outer dualism has its roots in the modern attempt to establish a unified self in which Descartes distinguishes mind from body and Locke

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[44] See Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journey of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 76-79.

[45] See Peter Brown, "Late Antiquity," in *A History of Private Life: Volume 1, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Vayne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). Also, Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly," 283-287.

[46] Mary Frohlich, R.S.C.J., "Spiritual Disciplines, Discipline of Spirituality," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dyer and Mark S. Borrows (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 74.

detaches consciousness from embodiment. The modern self becomes a product of the intellect disengaged and detached from bodies and social practices.[47] Christianity has tended to adopt this view and take the "inner self" as the true self and the primary locus of God's work in human lives. This view places the inner life and the bodily life in tension and prioritizes the inner over the outer, but Denys Turner notes, that while interiority has occupied a central role in descriptions of Christian spirituality, it really serves as more of a theological metaphor that a statement of human constitution.[48]

Throughout its modern history Christianity has struggled to find some means of resolving this tension, often vacillating between the two positions, as Stephen Sykes notes, Christianity has both an "inwardness tradition" and "externality tradition" related dialectically and emphasis tends to oscillate between the two.[49] There is a false dilemma here however, for there appears no need to insist on either/or, one tradition over the other, when a both/and response provides a necessary and sufficient condition for the construction of self and meaning. As the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor makes clear, the self and its ideas can only be understood in the context of embodiment and practices.[50] The deliberate analysis of the concept of "person" by the English philosopher P.F. Strawson makes the point even more conclusively, he insists that a person is "a type of entity such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates

[47] Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality," 46.

[48] See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[49] See Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 230-238.

[50] See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation, are equally applicable to a single individual of that type."[51] Strawson concludes thus, "So the concept of the pure individual consciousness, the pure ego, is a concept that cannot exist."[52] In an attempt to emphasize the influence of embodiment and emplacement to the construction of self and meaning, Wittgenstein reverses the Cartesian order and makes externality, the body and its practices, primary to the inner life.[53] Drawing from the work of Wittgenstein, the theologian Owen C. Thomas makes a similar argument claiming that the outer must be understood as the primary and major source of the inner.[54]

The need to collapse the dichotomy of inner and outer does not imply a denial of either one or the other; rather, to collapse the dichotomy means neither side receives priority over the other, but both are viewed as equally constitutive of the self. It is possible, then, to understand interiority in terms other than private introspection.[55] Interiority can be understood, Frohlich claims, as "that dimension or state of the human being capable of a living union between inner and outer, material and transcendent, communal and solitary, eternal and transient."[56] In this sense, interiority and innerness

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[51] P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), 102.

[52] Strawson, *Individuals*, 102.

[53] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

[54] Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality," 46.

[55] See for example Kenneth Schmitz, "The Geography of the Human Person," *Communio* 13 (Summer 1986): 27-48; also Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

[56] Frohlich, "Spiritual Disciplines," 74-75.

are related affectively through "presence" or "communion" and manifested "in such forms as human love, intuitive knowing, or a sense of group solidarity."[57]

The medieval theological tradition, according to Schmitz, offers an understanding of interiority as the capacity for engagement and intimacy with God which involves the most profound depths of one's being.[58] Here the inner and outer engage in an intimate act of receiving the presence of the other. Interiority has the fundamental capacity for intimate engagement and self-transcendent communion with God which marks the capacity of the individual to become "a place-in-the-world where this God dwells."[59] Thus, the embodied and embedded self becomes the locus of encounter and the site of God's presence in the world. Interiority then, as Lonergan claims, refers to self-appropriation rather than self-objectification.[60] In self-appropriation intimacy precedes and grounds objectivity, thus grounding self-presence with what is other; rather than reifying its object, the self enjoys a living apprehension of the true being of the other. In this sense, interiority and exteriority are co-constitutive, as Jean-Louis Chrétien points out, "Even self-delight, should it occur, is but the mature blossom of an immeasurably saturated encounter."[61] Such an encounter is always more than mere private experience because it always necessitates the other, Chrétien continues, "I experience the joy of seeing, of touching, of hearing, or attentively exercising the diverse possibilities that are

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[57] Ibid., 75.

[58] Schmitz, "The Geography of the Human Person," 27-48.

[59] Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 289.

[60] Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 14-17.

[61] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 122.

mine always by seeing, touching, hearing something other than myself, out in the world."[62] Thus, interiority as self-appropriation, as opposed to self-objectification, opens again the distinction made by Jean-Luc Marion between an idol and an icon. An idol fixes the gaze upon itself while an icon guides the gaze toward infinite relatedness.[63] Private introspection makes of the self an idol while interiority makes of the self an icon through which the love and presence of God flows.[64] Viewed in this way interiority does not take precedence over nor does it exclude the body and material conditions from spiritual experience, but instead describes the space in which God can be encountered.

Practice and Spiritual Formation

If spirituality refers to the daily lived experiences by which the whole person come to serve as an icon of God's love and presence, it necessarily entails a set of practices by which such a life is made possible. Spirituality and its concomitant formation refer to the daily living out—practicing—of life in the Spirit. The need for conceptual clarity in discussions of "practice" becomes evident with any cursory reading on the topic. Broadly stated, according to theologian Rebecca Chopp, practice refers to "socially shared forms of behavior that mediate between what are often called subjective and objective dimensions. A practice is a pattern of meaning and action that is both culturally

[62] Ibid.

[63] For a discussion of the distinction between an idol and an icon, see Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[64] Frohlich, "Spiritual Disciplines," 75.

constructed and individually instantiated."[65] Thus, practice refers to shared activities that shape meaning, provide and orientation to the world, and guide actions.[66] Practice in Christian spiritual formation, then, refers to the intentional and repeated actions and activities that orient daily life toward the divine and foster life in the Spirit.[67]

Intentional and repeated practice inscribes in the very bodies of practitioner—through habituation—a bodily memory that makes a given response second nature.[68] Christian practice is discipline, but should not be reduced to or limited to the practice of specific spiritual disciplines; rather, practice as I am using the term refers to actions and activities that, engaged in daily in an intentional way, orient our world toward the divine in such a way as to produce Christ-like character. Spiritual formation then becomes the means by which people generate order and meaning in their lives and intentionally and repeated engage practices that direct and form their lives to be like Christ.

The Body in Spiritual Practice

The search to connect with the spiritual life marks a search for the ultimate source of the self. The search to find the inner self defines an effort to determine meaning capable of transcending the temporal and changing structures of this world. The human

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[65] Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices in Theological Education* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 15

[66] Ibid.

[67] See Elizabeth Liebert, "The Role of Practice in the Study of Christian Spirituality," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dyer and Mark S. Borrows (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 86-90.

[68] Social anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu defines this as *habitus*, an unconscious regulator that reproduces and adjusts our responses to social situations in a way that seems to us self-evident. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78.

effort to ground the self, to make sense of the world, is always mediated through bodily existence and embodied experience however. The body, therefore, cannot be reduced to an object, to an "it" to be objectified and analyzed by an opposing mind; rather, the body always already plays a role in forming a sense of the self as it relates to and partners with others in the act of making meaning. Bodily existence, therefore, exerts an inescapable force upon thought and experience, such that, according to Merleau-Ponty, "by remaking contact with the body and the world, we shall rediscover ourselves."[69] The body precedes all reflection and like the world becomes, according to Merleau-Ponty, the "inalienable presence" that conditions all our knowing.[70] The body becomes grounds for the condition of discovering the self. As living beings, humans encounter the world in the flesh, and within this encounter self-discovery becomes possible. Human beings are always situated bodily; situated in relation to others, God, immediate environment and the world.[71] The body and embodied practices simply cannot be ignored.

Essential to Christian spirituality, therefore, is the understanding that the body knows and makes sense of its world through a series of multidimensional relationships which include apprenticeships, ritual practices, and bodily and spatial practices. This fact suggests a real need, as Claire Wolfteich explains, for the church to engage in "the learning of deep, embodied, practices of spiritual wisdom which are real and organic to

[69] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 239.

[70] Ibid., vii.

[71] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 4.

our life contexts while also anchored in the traditions of Christian spirituality."[72] The implications of this for Christian spiritual practice involve the body as the site at which the fruit of God's presence and power becomes most manifest to the world. By rethinking spirituality along these lines, spiritual formation becomes less about controlling the unruly body or subordinating it to the mind, and more about aligning the body with God's purposes for it.[73] Understanding how ordinary people are formed, how practices are learned, and how practices shape the self and make meaning allows for the development of spirituality for everyday life aimed at understanding, retrieving and shaping lives.[74] Spirituality viewed in this way holds promise for evangelical faith and practice, for it takes serious the everyday ways in which the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit participates in spiritual formation through habitual practices.

Evangelicalism appears in the process of rediscovering the contributions a rich tapestry of bodily knowledge makes available to spiritual experience. The sensible and sensual dimensions of human experience and expression are increasingly being acknowledged for the formative influence they exert on human meaning making.[75] Renewed appreciations for the tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions of perception, the way persons experience touch both on the surface of the flesh and inside

[72] Claire E. Wolfteich, "Standing at the Gap: Reading Classics and the Practices of Everyday Life," *Spiritus* 10:2 (Fall 2010): 255.

[73] Hall, "What are Bodies for?" 173-174.

[74] Wolfteich, "Standing at the Gap," 256.

[75] A good example of this can be found in a recent publication drawing out the implications of the sensible and sensual dimensions of art for Christian worship, see Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

their bodies, now grips the evangelical imagination.[76] The role of the material body in making meaning increasingly takes a more central role in evangelical discussions concerning spiritual practice. A return to the body becomes essential for two reasons: First, it becomes necessary to a robust and biblical understanding of spiritual formation. Second, it raises immediate awareness of the ways competing narratives can recruit by covertly conscripting bodies through routine daily practices.

[76] For recent published works emphasizing this, see James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

CHAPTER 4

(DE)FORMING THE BODY: SUBVERSIVE STORIES THAT SHAPE LIVES

The previous chapter discusses how the multidimensional functions of embodiment play an important role in constructing meaning and a felt sense of self. Always already immersed in an environment, persons acquire a practical orientation to the world through daily bodily involvement in it. The body plays an integral role in shaping both individual and communal conceptions of the world, as Merleau-Ponty so aptly notes, for the body serves as our general medium making possible a world.[1] Identity formation and meaning-making can now be understood as more than mere cognitive functions, for knowing subjects are not detached, disembodied, neutral observes standing at a distance and mentally processing objective inputs. The self is always already embedded in a world as an active agent engaged with and in formative social structures. As such, practical involvement in the world precedes theoretical evaluation which means "understanding" and "making sense" takes place at the level of lived experience and not that of discourse.[2] Taking this to be the case, spirituality and spiritual formation cannot be

[1] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 146.

[2] Csordas, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," 10.

reduced to the cognitive appropriation of a set of doctrinal truth claims, for spirituality involves lived experience.

Subversive Stories That Solicit Bodies

Spirituality as lived experience makes up one very important sphere of human existence necessary to a healthy sense of self, but spirituality is practiced in a world and lived out and defined in relation to other spheres of human existence. It proves impossible, therefore, to conceive of spirituality as capable of providing meaning to everyday life while remaining disconnected from the material practices that shape everyday human experience. Understanding spirituality requires attention to the material conditions which shape understanding through everyday formative practices. The common practice of conceptualizing and delineating spirituality over against materiality, insisting on either/or dichotomies of spiritual verses material and sacred verses profane, renders the natural world and its practices of little or no consequence to spiritual life. When the inner life delimits spirituality, it renders the everyday life of material practices irrelevant thus depriving it of any real meaning except as an exercise in "piety and patience."[3]

Against such views of spirituality as disembodied and unencumbered by material influences, recent studies in the social sciences have shown the importance of embodiment to spiritual life. Nevertheless, the idea of spirituality as a private and inner journey remains influential in Evangelical practice, being primarily proliferated through stories subversive to true biblical spirituality and practices antithetical to the purposes of

[3] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), 12.

God. Neglecting the role of the body in the daily practices of spirituality leaves it vulnerable to conscription by and through practices intended to form individuals in ways contrary to Scripture. To understand contemporary attitudes towards the body and spirituality it might prove helpful to look at the ways in which both have been subverted for socio-political and economic purposes.

(Re)storying Spirituality: Privatization and Commodification

Social institutions serve as the embodiment of tradition and institutional practices orient members to a certain way of being in the world. Until the Modern era, the centrality of sacred community and sacred tradition was embedded deeply in the fabric of society.[4] Organized religion held a monopoly on symbolic frameworks and, although never complete, exercised considerable control over spiritual practice.[5] Likewise, institutional religion monopolized certain goods instrumental in shaping meaning and forming identity; among them were a comprehensive world view, a social safety net, and a space for communal and associational life.[6] Spiritual life was intimately intertwined with and indivisible of the life of the religious community and its concomitant tradition, thus there existed a strong formative tie between individuals and the institutions that

[4] For a discussion of the centrality of communal tradition prior to the Enlightenment, see Arthur J. Dyke, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities: The Moral Bonds of Community* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1992).

[5] Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 90.

[6] For a discussion of how religious institutions lost this monopoly to competing institutions, see Philip S. Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: An Agenda for Research," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 116.

helped form their identity.[7] Religious communities and traditions, therefore, occupied a central place in the narrative of human life, but the rise of the modern world precipitated changes that would eventually alter the story line of the relation between individual and institution. The causal factors motivating and precipitating the changes, whether primarily socio-economic or socio-political,[8] do not interest this discussion; rather, the resultant severing of individual identity and values formation from institutional dependence and influence does interests us here.

Religion exercised considerable control over spiritual meaning and practice throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century through a variety of institutional structures.[9] This would all change, however, as religion became privatized and later spirituality individualized and interiorized. Here, the work of Jeremy Carrette and Richard King proves fruitful to this discussion.[10] Carrette and King identify two phases in the privatization of religion: The first they identify as the "the individualization of religion" which begins in the Enlightenment and arises out of modern liberal political theory. This is followed thereafter by a second phase in the twentieth century which they identify as "the commodification of religion" which arises out of the spread of global corporate capitalism. Recasting the story of religion in terms of individualization and

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[7] For a discussion of the relationship between religious institutions and religious identity, see Nancy T. Ammerman, "Religious Identities and Religious Institutions" in *The Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michele Dillon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 207-224.

[8] For a discussion of the various views concerning the causal factors driving the secularization of society, see Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate," 110-122.

[9] Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 90. The institutional structures Roof lists are youth camps, retreat centers, community centers, colleges, Bible Schools, publishing houses, and hospitals.

[10] See Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

privatization began in earnest then, according to Carrett and King, in the Enlightenment primarily through two movements: The separation of religion from the public sphere and the attempt to determine the particular essence of religion.[11]

Liberal Individualism and the Individualization of Religion

Notions of the self are not novel creations of Enlightenment thought; rather, themes of inwardness, intentionality, self-expression, and self-examination have roots stretching back into the Middle Ages.[12] Nevertheless, individualism gains ascendency in the changing political and cultural climates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the rise of modernity, for it is there that the rigid status system characteristic of feudal society gives way to the market economy, industrialization, specialization, and urbanization.[13] Responding to the displacement of a system in which social relations were based on custom and tradition, some European intellectuals turned to forms of social contract theory to explain how social relations between autonomous and free individuals could be formed. In contractual theory, social rules and structures are merely constructs governing social interaction, but have no constitutive effect on personal identity. Old

[11] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality* 38-53.

[12] Colin Morris traces the concept of the individual back to the intellectual and spiritual literature of twelfth century Europe. See Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200* (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 1987). For a response to Morris, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 82-84; see also Sarah Coakley, "Visions of the Self in Late Medieval Christianity: Some Cross-Disciplinary Reflections," in Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 71-88.

[13] For a discussion of the changes from premodern to modern society and the resultant impact on the relationship between individuals and institutions, see Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 48-51; John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2005), 167-174.

values of communal solidarity and conformity are replaced with new values focusing on individual freedom, detachment, personal self-interest and privacy.[14] The core of this type of individualism Robert Bellah terms "ontological individualism," for it holds that the formative human condition rests not in social relations or structures, but in "isolated and inviolable selves."[15]

While individualism as such may have roots extending back beyond the seventeenth century, the individualizing of religion, that is, relocating religion to the private sphere, has its roots in the fertile intellectual soil of Enlightenment thought where the underlying principles of liberalism challenged the traditional social and moral authority of the church.[16] In the minds of many European intellectuals, avoiding the religious conflicts of previous centuries required liberating the framework of society and politics of its mooring in religious authority. Philosophers such as John Locke and Immanuel Kant proposed consigning religion to the private sphere in an effort to clearly demarcate it from the public sphere, thus preserving the secular space of liberal political governance from the conflicts of competing religious ideologies.[17] To accomplish this, religion was recast primarily in terms of personal choice, beliefs, and private states of mind. Within the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, the free autonomous rational agent appears, only now capable of discovering the world and forging identity free of the

[14] Franke, *The Character of Theology*, 167-174.

[15] Robert N. Bellah, "Community Properly Understood: A Defense of 'Democratic Communitarianism,'" in *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, ed. Amatai Etzioni (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 17.

[16] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 2. See also Leithart's comments on liberalism and the privatization of religion in Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 17.

[17] Ibid., 2-3, 14.

constraints of external forces. In the philosophy of Kant, the autonomous and self-existent individual becomes the sole ground for meaning in spiritual experience.[18] Recast in this context, Carrette and King note, the relationship of individuals to religious communities "becomes a matter of personal assent to a set of beliefs, a matter of the private state of mind or personal orientation of the individual citizen in terms set out for it by modern liberalism."[19]

Beginning in the Enlightenment, the social authority once given to religion gets transferred to scientific rationalism, humanism, and the democratic nation state—a process referred to as secularization.[20] Religion increasingly lost direct contact with the realities of daily life as it was divested of the secular and confined solely to religious doctrine and practice.[21] Religious institutions retained significance only in formal aspects such as "dedicating and sanctifying the crucial events of life such as birth or marriage or death."[22] Providing the space for autonomous rational agents to exercise freedoms to pursue self-chosen goals and private conceptions of the good life became the primary purpose of social institutions. Subsequently, liberal individualism recasts the story of communal tradition, no longer in terms of structuring or formative influence, but now in terms of an arena for the pursuit of individual self-determination in which institutions

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[18] Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1998), 40.

[19] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 14.

[20] Ibid., 13. For a discussion of the secularization debate, see Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate," 110-122; see also an interview conducted with Charles Taylor by Bruce Ellis Benson, "What it Means to Be Secular," *Books and Culture* 8 (July/August 2002), http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2002/julaug/14.36.html (accessed October 9, 2012).

[21] Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, 96-97.

[22] Ibid., 97.

exist only to provide the necessary order for making such self-determined activity possible.[23] Severing the co-constitutive relationship between individuals and institutions in this way renders the institution a mere pragmatic necessity, useful only for purposes of promoting self-interest. In the same manner that individuals and institutions could be clearly demarcated by defining conceptual distinctions, so too could religion be demarcated from other spheres of human existence.

The Enlightenment preoccupation with determining the precise characteristics of religion gave rise to the misleading notion that conceptual distinctions were real features of the world, as opposed to culturally constructed ways of understanding religion. Demarcating spheres of existence by determining and defining conceptual distinctions may prove useful for analysis, but it neglects the co-constitutive relationship that exists between subjects and objects. "The attraction of defining an essence," according to Carrette and King, "is that it clearly demarcates a field for the purpose of analysis."[24] Making such a move, however, leaves the misleading impression that religion clearly does constitute a sphere of human existence divorced from the spheres of politics, economics, and culture.[25] Recasting the story along these lines, of course, distorts the true nature of religion and spirituality. Neither religion nor spirituality exist independent of or unencumbered by the material conditions through which they acquire meaning; that is, they cannot be understood in isolation of the social, political, and economic world.

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[23] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 195.

[24] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 3.

[25] Ibid.

Psychology: Individualizing and Interiorizing Spirituality

The individualization of religion and the rise of the free autonomous rational self which took shape in the Enlightenment initiated an intellectual dialogue that would give rise to the interiorization of spirituality. The nineteenth century Romanticist response to Enlightenment rationalism found a voice in the introspective approach of the German theological tradition which would prove influential in the rise of psychology by the end of the century.[26] In fact, Turner notes, that since the nineteenth century the Christian tradition has effectively psychologized the theological metaphor of interiority.[27] Nevertheless, notions of spirituality as interior, located in the modern individual self, arise with the development of psychology as a distinct discipline of human investigation and analysis.[28] Not surprising since etymologically psychology is associated with the life of the soul which traditionally implies a focus on the interior life, thus psychology becomes the study of the life of the mind.[29]

Striving for legitimacy as a disciple, psychology attempts to construct explanatory models based on the natural sciences in order to explain human experience. By mid twentieth century, Nikolas Rose suggests, these explanatory models of human experience come to be understood in terms of a range of institutions and powers determined within

[26] For a discussion of the relationship between psychology, religion and spirituality, see James M. Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (New York: Springer, 2009).

[27] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*,

[28] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 44.

[29] Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 18.

the "psy" disciplines which claim authority over prior models of the self.[30] According to Foucault, these networks and institutions create the subject through relations of power. He explains, "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize."[31] These new authoritative stories of the self both subvert and supplant older narratives of the self which were grounded in philosophical imagination and religious introspection.[32]

Promising to provide a more scientific explanation of the self, a sense of self grounded in objective science, the new psychological paradigm shifts the very conditions for thinking about modern subjectivity itself. Psychology, touted as an objective science, becomes the new interpretive structure for understanding human experience and forming personal identity.[33] Forms of the self which arise from within the new psychological paradigm, as Carrett and King indicate, "Constantly inscribe the language of private self and private possessions and actively subvert awareness of relational and social identity."[34] Assumed as a given, the modern autonomous self serves as a basic philosophical presupposition governing the way research into human experience gets conducted. As Carrett and King further note, "Psychology carries this private and

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[30] Nikolas, Rose 1998, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104-105.

[31] Michele Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer 1982): 781.

[32] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 59.

[33] See Paul Ricouer, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Theory* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000).

[34] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 59.

individualized self into its methods and measurements, a philosophical assumption that becomes a precondition of experimentation. It seeks to calculate and mark out a self for social ordering, production and consumption."[35]

Capitalism, Psychology and the Commodification of Religion

The engagement of psychology with religion has meant a reconfiguration of religion in terms of the psychological self, thus removing the social dimension of religion and creating a spirituality of the self.[36] When this happens, Carrett and King note, "The internal economy of the self is set above the external economy of social relations."[37] Spirituality becomes a marketable commodity shaped to individual desires and produced according to consumer demand, created and driven by market forces, and manipulated by political and economic powers. Psychology provides the vehicle for these market forces to transport religion through the language of spirituality without politically threatening the status quo. In effect, as Carrett and King claim, "The territorial takeover of religion by psychology (individualization) is the platform for the takeover of spirituality by capitalism (corporatization)."[38]

With the integration of psychology and religion a new religion of the self emerges, its effectiveness derived from allegiance to the free market of individual

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 69. For a discussion of the influence of psychology on spiritualities of the inner self in the United States since the 1950s, see Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 142-167.

[37] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 69.

[38] Ibid., 79.

choice.[39] Private forms of spirituality integrate well in a consumer culture in which consumer choice reinforces the idea of a free autonomous subject. Meaning and identity, cut free of social and institutional moorings, become commodities to be purchased in an economy of exchange. The interiorization and commodification of spirituality has its roots in the engagement of religion and psychology in the late nineteenth century, but interiorization was made popular, according to Carrett and King, in the 1950s and 1960s with the rise of Humanistic Psychology and professional counselling. Recast in terms of a private and psychological phenomenon, spirituality then experiences a second major shift in the 1980s where, according to Carrett and King, the individualization of religion—"involving the creation of individual, consumer oriented spiritualities"—begins to overlap with an increasing emphasis upon the commodification of religion described in terms of "the tailoring of spiritual teachings to the demands of the economy and of individual self-expression to business success."[40] The interiorization and commodification of spirituality and the engagement of spirituality with psychology have given rise to a therapeutic culture in which the therapist has replaced the prophet.

Therapeutic Culture and Spiritual Formation

In addition to the forces of consumer capitalism which deny any authority beyond the individual, the Church must reckon with the pervasive influence of the therapeutic culture. It would be naive to believe there are no power interests at work in therapy for, as

[39] See Paul Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self Worship* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1977).

[40] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 44. For a discussion of the rise of humanistic and transpersonal approaches in psychology beginning in the 1960s, see Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 23-25. For a brief discussion of the influence of commodification on spirituality, see Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 11-12.

David Fitch states, "Therapy is spiritual formation of a suspicious kind. It is the formative religion of democratic capitalism."[41] Therapists reinterpret a person's life according to a particular theory of the self. There are no neutral positions or value free theories, as Habermas points out, the therapist occupies a position of power, imposes a prestructured story line upon the patient, and re-narrates a life according to a particular school of psychological thought.[42] And Foucault convincingly argues, the modern "technology of the self" arising out of the psychological disciplines turns the therapist into a pervasive force in structuring identity—the psychiatrist becomes the "master of truth."[43]

These alternative narratives are often dangerously and covertly subversive to true biblical spirituality, for since Christians are immersed in these stories daily, they are seductively formed and transformed by them in particular ways, and oriented by them to certain ways of being in the world. The Christian becomes a recruit to a particular way of understanding the world by the conscription of the body through formative practices. Nowhere is this more damaging to Christian formation than in a consumer culture bent on catering to self-comfort and self-consumption. Capitalist societies train people, through sensual appeal and bodily practice, to think of things in terms of commodities to be consumed according to individual consumer preference—including religious

[41] David E. Fitch, *The Great Give Away: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 185. See also L. Gregory Jones, "A Thirst for God or Consumer Spirituality?" *Modern Theology* 13:1 (January 1997): 17; Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 39-41.

[42] Jurgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in Jurgen Habermas, *The Hermeneutic Tradition*, ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 254-265.

[43] Michele Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 67.

commitments.[44] Religion, spirituality, and God come to be understood in instrumental terms, they become merely means to the end of individual desires.[45] Rather than understanding human desire as a longing only satisfied by responding to the transforming call of God, a call which comes from beyond the self and elicits a move beyond the self, desires signify the need to dive deeper into self and engage new levels of consumption.

Consumer Impulses: Conscripting the Body

Actions performed in the material body mater, for our sense of self does not float unencumbered from material conditions. Cultural and personal identity are not permanently fixed pillars, they are malleable and mutable, subject to manipulation and exploitation. Daily people engage in bodily routines and practices imposed by market economies and social structures that form and establish identity and values so covertly that it goes unrecognized by many.[46] Social bodies and networks devoid of any true sense of biblical spirituality establish practices that imbed their own values deep in the bodies of individual participants. The body becomes the primary site for this kind of social construction, as Reischer and Koo point out, "The anthropological record amply demonstrates, bodies have been and continue to be reshaped in a myriad of culturally relevant ways."[47] Within the social realm the body marks the site of contest and control,

[44] See Philip D. Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church in the Marketplace of Desire," *Modern Theology* 9:4 (October 1993): 319-348.

[45] Jones, "A Thirst for God or Consumer Spirituality?" 17.

[46] For a discussion of the social, political, and economic forces on individual and group identity, see Eric Reischer and Kathryn S. Koo, "The Body Beautiful: Symbolism and Agency in the Social World," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 297-317.

[47] Reischer and Koo, "The Body Beautiful," 297.

it becomes a "template and tool," a potent symbol of core social values, thus the body "can never be a struggle-free zone." [48]

Markets, Consumer Behavior, Trademarks and Mimetic Practice

Pierre Bourdieu has convincingly demonstrates how "structuring dispositions" constituted in the practices of social bodies inscribe themselves in the bodies of individuals.[49] These "structuring dispositions" serve to constitute the world in certain ways through the routine daily practices they impose.[50] The body becomes the site of imposition for these structuring practices since the daily material actions that constitute them are performed in the body. The formative practices of the social body are necessary for perceiving a world, but the social body requires the bodies of individuals in which to instantiate its values and practices.[51] The body, therefore, acting as a medium of representation, either becomes an icon of social values or the mechanism of social power and control.[52] Within the contemporary social, political, and economic milieu, the body as an icon of social values does not point beyond itself to the God who creates and sustains all bodies; rather it points to the values of the market economy and consumer choice. Thus, within the culture of contemporary late-capitalism, Terence Turner notes, the body becomes the "object of seduction by advertising" and the object of

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[48] John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 40, 87.

[49] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 52.

[50] Ibid., 53.

[51] Ibid., 58. For a detailed discussion, see Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 80-100.

[52] Reischer and Koo, "The Body Beautiful," 299.

"interpellation by semiotically loaded commodities."[53] Within commercial spheres of exchange, then, the market becomes a powerful influence exploiting the body as a mechanism of power and control.

The market influences identity and establishes values through means of imitation and contact.[54] Marketing strategies create consumer sympathy for a product by means of imitation or mimicry. Consumer identity is formed through mimetic function—getting ahold of something by means of copying or imitation—and sensuous connection between the body of the perceiver and the thing perceived.[55] Trademarks serve this purpose, for the mark "operates as a signature of authenticity" and it "registers real contact," thus marking a moment of imprinting—branding.[56] In mass mediated consumer societies the trademark or brand organizes the "magic of the mimetic faculty."[57] By means of mimicry the body becomes a vehicle for the expression of a "commercial surrogate identity" appropriated under the trademark, thus becoming a means of transport for the promotion and proliferation of core social values.[58] So pervasive are these social, political and economic influences, so vast their reach that everyday life becomes an immersion in formative practices imposed by them.

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[53] Terence Turner, "Bodies and Anti-bodies: Flesh and Fetish in Contemporary Social Theory," in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27.

[54] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 220. For a discussion of the role of mimesis and alterity on trademarks, see Rosemary J. Coombe, "Embodied Trademarks: Mimesis and Alterity on American Commercial Frontiers," *Cultural Anthropology* 11:2 (1996) 202-224.

[55] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 220.

[56] Coombe, "Embodied Trademarks," 205.

[57] Ibid., 206.

[58] Ibid., 205-206.

Developing an effective approach to the formation of biblical spirituality entails an understanding of the ways in which other imposing influences present counter formative practices antithetical to God's purposes. Too often the Church blindly embraces the tactics of corporate marketing, assuming as its desired end to attract new consumers in the market for religious goods and services. Catering to market practices has turned Christianity into a brand, a trademark, identifying a certain type of religious consumption. This strategy, however, only further forms and conforms to consumer practices that establish through habituation deep seated market values and consumer identity, thus forming the consumer in ways counter to and antithetical to true biblical spirituality. That people are daily being immersed in practices that influence and form them in ways contrary to Christian values should be cause for concern and careful reflection on the part of the Church. The recent obsession with all things sensual has lead to misunderstandings, misuses and abuses of the body, for sensuality divorced from a biblical spirituality and the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit becomes a tool used in the pursuit of illegitimate human desires.

Somatic Culture and Sensual Obsession

Contemporary consumer culture has done much to foster the current obsession with all things sensual, for it takes the body as the locus of all the enjoyments, sensations and pleasures available for consumption. For consumer culture the good life is no longer something to be cultivated through development of certain virtues, but becomes a

consumer commodity which can be purchased.[59] A new relationship obtains between bodies and selves, in which a new conception of self emerges with a much greater emphasis on appearance, performance, and control and management of impressions.[60] Concern for character with its emphasis on the virtues of honor, integrity, industry, thrift, and temperance gets replaced by a concern for personality with its emphasis on appearance, likeableness, creativity, and charm.[61] In this new milieu, according to Warren Susman, personal identity is formed in the act of public performance which constitutes an act of self-invention.[62]

Indeed, following Foucault's discussion of self-invention, the focus of attention moves away from authenticity and consistency in the overall structuring of identity towards the idea of invention and discontinuity in the quest for new ways to live.[63] The primary tenets in the agenda of contemporary consumer culture are new experiences, sensations, and appearances, and the body marks the locus of such experiences, sensations, and appearances. Changes to the body are no longer dependent solely on natural physiological processes; no longer can the body be understood in terms of mere biological fact, for it has been transformed into a project.

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[59] For a detailed discussion of the place of the body in consumer culture, see Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2007).

[60] See Mike Featherstone, "Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture," *Body and Society* 16 (2010): 193-221.

[61] See Warren Susman, "Personality and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture" in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, eds. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1979), 220.

[62] Susman, "Personality and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture," 233.

[63] See Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50.

The basic presupposition underlying the agenda of the body as a project in late capitalist culture is the body's malleability and flexibility.[64] Belief in the malleability of the body has prompted Anthony Giddens to claim, "We have become responsible for the design of our own bodies."[65] Philip Hancock notes that the celebrity Cher once quipped in an interview with the *Glasgow Evening Times*: "Nature is not always the best. I have the money to improve on nature and I do not see why I should not."[66] Cher's comment captures the widespread attitude that the body serves as a lifestyle accessory or symbol of status and, as Featherstone points out, because of the body's plasticity it has become a thing to be stylized through shaping and sculpting.[67] The body conceived as a project, because of its malleability, becomes a question of lifestyle choice and identity. The body can be shaped and sculpted through diet, exercise, or cosmetic surgery and it can be stylized through cosmetics, clothing, piercing, or tattooing.[68] This cultural obsession with the body, evident in the cultural fascination with bodily appearance, status, and sensual pleasures, exposes an unhealthy narcissism antithetical to spiritual growth. The problem lay not so much in the sensual bodily appetites as such, but in the mistaken assumption that the locus of true and meaningful transformation is the body.

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[64] See Hancock, *The Body, Culture and Society*, 3. See also Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). For a discussion of the body as project, see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[65] Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity*, 102.

[66] Hancock, *The Body, Culture and Society*, 3.

[67] See Featherstone, "Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture," 200-207.

[68] See Mike Featherstone, "The Body in Consumer Culture," *Theory, Culture,* Society 1:18 (1982); also see Hancock, *The Body, Culture and Society*; Featherstone, "Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture."

When personal identity, self-worth, and meaning are understood reductively in terms of bodily project or performance, constituted as it were through status and appearance, bodily transformation becomes of primary importance. The body must look and feel a certain way, portray a certain status and perform at a certain level in order to achieve the desired sense of identity and worth. Thus, marketers are continually extolling the positive benefits of bodily transformative work.[69] There should, nevertheless, be no misunderstanding here, for bodily maintenance and transformation are not bad things in themselves. What must not go unnoticed, however, is the ways in which such embodied practices, when wrongly directed, make the body an end in itself rather than understanding the body's importance in cultivating spirituality.

The idea of bodily transformation is not new however; it has long been a standard feature of western culture with roots in early Christianity. Although, in the early Christian tradition, the notion of transformation originates with a divine calling in which response to the call involves the whole person in the transformative act of fashioning one's life to serve God. The spiritual life aims at the appropriate ordering of one's whole life in response to the call of God. The whole person, including bodily senses, emotions, and appetites are essential to cultivating the spiritual life. Bodies are important, but not as ends in themselves, rather always as a means for discerning and responding to God's purpose for bodies. A truly biblical spirituality seeks to ground identity in the being of God; it should permeate every sphere of daily human existence. Rooted in corporeal existence, biblical spirituality stands opposed to all formative structures with purposes antithetical to Christ-like character formation.

[69] Featherstone, "Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture," 200.

PART THREE

(RE)CONCIEVING THE BODY FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

CHAPTER 5

(RE)FORMING THE BODY: EMBODIMENT AND THE BIBLICAL STORY

The warning of the previous chapter makes explicit how alternative narratives often co-opt Christian spirituality by conscripting the body through daily formative practices. Unwittingly the Christian acquires an orientation to the world through narratives and practices aimed at forming individuals according to corporate capitalist interests. This unwitting conscription of the body through daily routines and practices becomes possible through the deep seated belief that "knowing" and "doing" are completely separate functions—that identity and meaning are products of the individual mind entirely independent of bodily actions. Couple this belief with the mistaken notions that Christianity can be reduced to the individual cognitive appropriation of a body of doctrine and spirituality reduced to a private inner journey, and institutional religion becomes all about the mind and heart—the significance of bodily practice gets neglected. This condition finds confirmation in the firm conviction that institutions function solely to provide a space and order for the pursuit of self-interest and self-expression—a condition in which institutional religion comes to be understood as serving the interest of individuals seeking to express their own private spirituality.

Developing an engaged and embodied spirituality, grounded in and informed by the narrative texts of Scripture, becomes a necessary condition for an effective resistance to the subversive narratives and practices operative in the world. In this chapter I will attempt to demonstrate the important role of the body in biblical spirituality and offer it as a means to resist the cooption of the body by alternative interests.

Biblical Spirituality and Embodiment: Call, Response, and Resistance

Resisting the individualist, consumerist, and capitalist cooption of spirituality requires an engaged spirituality informed by the narrative texts of Scripture and the religious practices of the believing community. Developing such a spirituality can begin by returning to the Hebraic tradition in which knowledge and identity begin within the dynamic relationship of call and response. Beginning with the call requires a return to language as the means by which beings can break forth into presence—the call of God becomes the ultimate source of presence. Taking the call of God as originary means existence arises out of a listening in which the proper response is a welcoming and receptivity of the call. Spirituality is lived out within this dynamic relationship of call and response in which obedience and fidelity become the grounds for proper knowledge and identity. This becomes most evident in the incarnation in which the embodied Christ serves as the exemplary model of obedience and fidelity, thus providing the ultimate standard for mimetic practice. In this sense, spirituality can never be merely a private matter.

The Call: Language and Presence

Biblical spirituality never originates in the self, never arises as a response to some private inner feeling, it can never be disembodied thought cut free of its moorings in tradition, and this is precisely where it diverges from much contemporary spirituality. Thought can never be uprooted from its historicity as though not always already immersed in a dialogue with traditions that shape it and give it its "idiomatic tongue."[1] Christian thought remains indebted to and in dialogue with a Jewish tradition that has in various ways and to various degrees shaped it and influenced its very language. Any discourse on Christian spirituality will be made richer by returning to the central motif around which the Hebraic experience of language gets organized, for here language is understood as the occasion of all being—for language makes presence possible. Language in its highest order, as word of God, constitutes a call, and when assimilated into the human world gets "structured by the modalities of reception and response."[2] The word, in the biblical narrative, "is never simply a word, nor a word about, but always already a word to."[3] The word, as divine address, accompanies every coming into presence and constitutes, in André Neher's expression, its "rhythm."[4] Biblical existence begins in divine address, "And God said" (Genesis 1), thus humanity finds itself confronted by a determinate comprehension of a divine call, and within the reflexive

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[1] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 2.

[2] Marlene Zarader, *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 49.

[3] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 49.

[4] André Neher, *The Prophetic Existence*, trans. William Wolfe (South Brunswick, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1969), 137-138.

movement of call and response is played out the opening of presence as revelation. "All revelation," Buber reminds us, "is a calling and a mission."[5]

Biblical existence originates in a call, always already persons are summoned by a call which comes from beyond the self, and solicits a response to move beyond the self. God reveals himself in the call, in the divine solicitation, and humans discover themselves and all existence as being summoned.[6] Divine revelation, then, can never be simply the manifestation of God in a saying, thus it can never be reduced to mere cognitive appropriation of content; rather, revelation has meaning only as encounter. In calling God reveals, but that which is received can never be reduced to mere cognitive content, for it is always already a presence.[7] All life revolves around this rhythmic movement of solicitation and response, encounter and revelation, according to Buber, but not revelation as propositional dogma—not an "I know" or "I believe"—but around an encounter which carries with it an imperative call: "Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4).[8] The divine command to "hear" never comes incidentally, for it implies a prior call—a call which has already come, always already awaiting an awakening to it and acknowledging of it—but awakening to and acknowledging of the call necessitates a listening. That the call comes first, always already awaiting our response, implies that in the Bible human existence begins with listening, not only, or even necessarily, a listening

[5] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 164.

[6] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 74.

[7] Buber, *I and Thou*, 158.

[8] Ibid., 162-164.

to words—not essentially a vocalization—but listening as an intimate awareness that the divine call lays claim to us, body and soul.[9]

Again, by returning to embodiment as a methodological principle for collapsing dichotomies it becomes possible to collapse the sight-hearing dichotomy between Greek and Hebraic thought so popularized by Bultmann and others. Following Jean-Louis Chrétien, it might be argued that the various powers of the call are never addressed to a disembodied mind, but to the whole human person which implies a connection between voice and senses.[10] Recall, the essential difference between the two traditions can be traced to a divergent emphasis of accents from the Hebraic priority of the auditory (listening and therefore obedience) and the Greek priority of the visual (seeing and thereby discerning). But what happens to the dichotomy, Chrétien asks, "if the visible itself, through beauty, calls us and speaks to us?"[11] In such instances, the "eye listens" becoming intimately aware of the call, the inaudible voice can be visually discerned, thus the audible voice cannot be the only voice.[12] The call can be sensual and alluring, appealing as it does to the senses, and since humans are tactile by nature, the body listens through touch.[13]

To begin with the call from beyond the self, to define the self in terms of listening and obedience, to involve the entire body in the acquisition of knowledge, and to situate

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[9] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 75.

[10] Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 3.

[11] Ibid., 14.

[12] Ibid., 33-43. In Chapter 2 Chrétien addresses the idea of "The Visible Voice."

[13] Ibid., 83-131. In Chapter 4 Chrétien addresses the idea of "The Body and Touch."

spirituality within the encounter of call and response, means knowing and doing conjoin. Knowledge becomes the product of receiving and welcoming the Other revealed through an encounter which comes first as a call. In this sense, knowledge cannot be understood as individual cognitive appropriation, in which case it would take God as its object. "The encounter with God does not come to man," Buber proclaims, "in order that he may henceforth attend to God, but in order that he may prove its meaning in action in the world."[14] The claim Buber makes calls for careful consideration, for the encounter with God does not come in order that humans may turn God into an object of investigation and appropriation, merely cognize the meaning of the encounter; rather, the encounter with God comes so that the meaning of the encounter may be lived out faithfully in the world. In the encounter, knowledge arises out of an experience taking the form of "receptive sympathy" and in this sense expresses itself in the form of fidelity.[15] This is not fidelity to a thought, nor to content, but to a presence—fidelity as a response to an encounter, to a call.

The Response: Montage and Mimesis

The encounter can never be reduced to a mere cognitive experience, for it involves the whole person including the material conditions which give space and shape to the experience. The call comes to embodied beings, to which the proper response is always a living out the meaning of the encounter through action in the world. In other words, the real meaning of the encounter becomes determined within the practice, for this

[14] Buber, *I and Thou*, 164.

[15] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 76.

becomes the necessary condition for relationship. Otherwise, knowledge makes of its subject matter nothing more than an object of appropriation. Making sense of the encounter, then, requires inquiring more deeply into the ways in which the body and material conditions together play a role in interpreting and shaping the meaning of experience. Here a brief return to recent work in the social sciences may prove helpful.

The social sciences over the past few decades have witnessed a shift in conceptual approaches to the body in an attempt to overcome the longstanding separation of knowledge and practice.[16] Conceptualizations of the body as a "template for social organization" or as a biologically based structure separate from and independent of the mind have given way to interpretations of the body in terms of a multiplicity of complex and dynamic relations.[17] Understandings of the body, of the self, and of making sense of the world in general, take shape within a network of complex and complicated relations which necessarily involves multiple and fluid contexts. Past tendencies in the social sciences to reduce the source of knowledge to a pre-defined context no longer proves convincing, for contexts involve the dynamic interplay of relations among things. As Taussig notes, "context" is not a "secure epistemic nest in which our knowledge eggs are to be safely hatched."[18] In such a case, self and other are intertwined in a complex of relations in which both are explicitly implicated and constituted in a juxtaposition of dissimilarity and sameness which might be explained and examined in terms of montage,

[16] See Margaret Lock, "Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of Bodily Practice and Knowledge," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 133-155.

[17] Lock, "Cultivating the Body," 133-155. See also Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.

[18] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 44.

mimesis and alterity.[19] Montage, as I am using the term, refers to a reflexive operation arising from a disruption in the monological storyline which occurs when one is faced with alterity.[20] It speaks to the disorder that arises from within the interplay of sameness and difference which implicates both self and other in an act of co-constitution. Montage describes the reflexive response to disruptions of the orderly narrative by a counter narrative which always alters in some sense and to some degree the sense of self. An encounter between self and other, between self and God, opens the space for this reflexive operation to occur.

Spirituality involves identity, a proper understanding of one's self in relation to God, others, and the world, and it involves meaning, a felt sense of ultimate value and purpose which transcends one's self. This comes about only when one stands face to face with the Other (the call), through montage; a disruption breaks the monologue and forces dialogue (the response) thereby bringing about self-discovery. Embodied identity arises out of these disruptive and reflexive encounters mediated through material bodies. The natural world marks the locus of these encounters and, as such, human dependency upon the natural world intends to elicit awareness of and communication with God as its ultimate source. The spiritual life, therefore, should not be understood as an escape from the body or the world; rather, as Schmemann suggests, spirituality "is the arrival at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world."[21]

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[19] See Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 45; Lock, "Cultivating the Body," 144.

[20] The purpose here is not to be faithful to Taussig's use of the term "montage," rather it is to capture something of the dialectical idea he raises in his study of written ethnography.

[21] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 27.

Within the disruptive encounters with God, meaning and sense-making takes place, self-discovery occurs, and the spiritual world opens up to the material world. This vantage point opens within the encounter, within an openness to the encounter, in which self and other engage in a co-constitutive act of embracing and being embraced or of rejecting and being rejected. The encounter opens the space for montage, mimesis and alterity by forcing a choice of "being like" or "remaining different." Mimesis becomes the means by which the material world and its practices can be structured by or related to ultimate reality. The mimetic relationship between art and nature which describes the human ability to produce similarities[22] can also be recognized in the ritual performances of religion. Mimesis provides a way of understanding material practices as formative practices, thereby opening up the mutually informing interplay between material and spiritual realities. These ideas can be applied to Old Testament narrative accounts of the flesh, for within the disruptive encounters with both God and others the flesh materializes.

Genesis: Encountering Flesh

The biblical story of the genesis of humanity begins in an intimate intertwining of material relations and divine insufflation in which the word *basar* (flesh) is used to describe the material product of God's act of creating and relating. Indeed, creating and relating are determined in the same act of calling, for the very essence of creating and relating can be deciphered through linguistic relations.[23] The call that brings beings into

[22] See Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 333-336.

[23] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 46.

presence, that summons them to be at all, also brings them to be in relation. The linguistic injunction to be, and to be in relation, constructs the narrative flow of creation. The linguistic relation plays off a common root word. The clearest example of this is the creation of the first human (Genesis 2:7). Adam (*adam*) has his genesis from the pre-existing material of the earth and stands in linguistic relation to the earth (*adamah*).[24] Likewise, the narrative presents the woman (*isha*) as constituted from the man (*ish*), she not only shares a material relation with the man—having been taken from his rib or side—she shares a linguistic relation in that they share a common linguistic root (Genesis 2:22). Consequently they become one flesh.[25]

When the text presents the first human as formed from the dust of the earth, it reveals the linguistic and material relations, but what exists is merely material—flesh (*basar*) in the sense of tissue or muscle.[26] As the text intends to imply, however, materiality is a necessary but insufficient condition for living being, for ending the story here leaves the first human nothing more than inanimate clay. Life requires something more than mere matter. The very source of the man's being, the means of animate life, is the breath of God—flesh encounters divine breath. The insufflation of the breath of life

[24] Wenham denies any etymological connection between the two words, but recognizes here an instance of paronomasia (play on similar sounding words) which he claims is a favorite device of Hebrew writers, see Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis 1-15," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glen W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 57.

[25] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 46.

[26] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 24. For the various ways in which the Hebrew word *basar* is used, see Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 117-134. See also David M. Carr, *The Erotic World: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 28-33.

makes the inanimate clay a living being.[27] Enlivened by the divine breath the man becomes *nephesh* (animated flesh), although often translated as soul, Carr points out, *nephesh* refers just as much to the body's vitality and intellect.[28] According to the Genesis narrative of creation, then, the human person cannot be so cleanly separated into a material body and nonmaterial intellect or soul. A material body enlivened by one divine power constitutes the human person.[29]

The living body of flesh, "the mud and the breath"[30] defines a relationship to God whose very breath it shares. God forms the first human out of the fertile soil of the earth. Created from the fertile soil, however, connotes nothing negative, for it reflects humanity's material relation and original connectedness to the earth and destiny to work it (Genesis 2:15).[31] Here is man situated in a world, related to God and beast, yet remaining incomplete. There must have been some knowledge of self, no doubt, but in the disruptive encounters with God and animals, Adam only experienced radical dissimilarity. Adam's naming the beasts (Genesis 2:19) made manifest the meaning and value God gave each kind, thus implying knowledge of their place and function in the created order, but no other created thing occupied the same place or shared the same function, Adam experienced only difference, so God created a partner.

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[27] See Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 22-27.

[28] Carr, *The Erotic World*, 30.

[29] See Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 16-19; Carr, *The Erotic World*, 29-30.

[30] James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 37.

[31] Carr, *The Erotic World*, 30.

In creating Eve, God made a space for an intimate kinship to exist in the bodily relationship between the man and the woman. When Adam first speaks of the woman, though he does not yet know her, he declares her "flesh from my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). Adam sees the woman in her nakedness, as Cooper points out, "He sees her as her body."[32] While similar, she is different from him. While originating from the self, she is other than him. While from him, she comes as God's gift for him.[33] Another rupture occurs in the storyline of Adam's life in which the self comes to know itself only through another who is other. As Cooper notes, "His recognition of her as another arises as nothing less than his own self-discovery."[34] Through another, who is other, the man discovers his place and function in the world. The two share in a common flesh. Here the term "flesh of flesh" refers to something more than tissue or muscle; it refers to a relationship mediated through the body in which self and other are co-constitutive. As a complex of relations the body serves as a means to identity, but only within these relationships can a sense of self be achieved.

The narrative account in Genesis 2 offers a unique perspective on this relationship, as Westermann points out, for among the creation myths of the Ancient Near East only the biblical account recognizes human existence as a partnership of man and woman.[35] Creation of this partnership not only responds to the problem of loneliness, but provides a helper in the work of the garden (Genesis 2:18). Thus, the first two

[32] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 26.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 232. See also Carr, *The Erotic World*, 28; Cooper, *Life is the Flesh*, 26.

humans are two things simultaneously, "workers and lovers."[36] There appears a progression in self-discovery evident in the narrative, as Cooper notes, "First there was simple flesh. Then there was flesh from flesh. Now there is one flesh."[37] Flesh comes to identify and describe a special relationship mediated in and through material bodies.[38] Such a relationship gives rise to a subjective spiritual unity whereby the sharing of deepest vocations and purposes become sacred and joyful. Material actions, therefore, give rise to spiritual reality.

Leviticus: Sanctifying the Flesh

The creation story of Genesis 2 marks moments of human epiphany in which the relational character of God and humans are revealed. The narrative account of creation reveals the disruptive encounters that give rise to human self-discovery in which function, place, vocation, and purpose relative to these relations are determined. Every encounter of a personal narrative with the foreign narrative of another reveals something more about the human self in relation to the other. In the disruptive encounter with God, in that moment of human self-discovery in the face of the total otherness of God, the intrinsic holiness of God stands in stark contrast to the human condition. Holy in person and character, God stands apart as absolute Other. God's holiness is communicated in every act of divine solicitation; therefore, in order for God's presence to be a source of

[36] Carr, *The Erotic World*, 35.

[37] Cooper, *Life is the Flesh*, 26.

[38] For a discussion of Old Testament use of flesh (*basar*) as a term for relationship, see Victor P. Hamilton, "The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17" in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 179-180.

grace and blessing, those who welcome the call with "Here I am" (Genesis 22:1; Exodus 3:4)[39] and wish to dwell with God must also be holy.[40]

The Levitical prescription governing the ritual processes of purification and sanctification intends to bring about the conditions necessary for personal contact with the divine. As Cooper notes, "The relative effects of personal contact with God's holiness always depend on the relative moral and ritual state of the subject."[41] Seeking the nearness of God, therefore, Jonathan Magonet claims, entails "a life regulated, conducted and defined within a particular framework of practices, rituals and actions."[42] Nearness to God can only have beneficial effect if the subject seeking nearness becomes holy. The subject's holiness, however, can only be determined by reference to God's person and communicative acts. The central command of the Levitical prescription evidences this fact when it declares: "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean (Leviticus 10:10).[43] The purifying and sanctifying process involves both material bodies and material conditions.

The word common as a descriptive term refers to anything natural in the world and includes both objects and people. Identifying a thing as common simply describes its normal state of being within the created order. Cooper notes that common things can be either clean or unclean according to their relative state of purity.[44] Things can be common

[39] All scripture citations are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

[40] Cooper, *Life is the Flesh*, 18.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Jonathan Magonet, "Spirituality and Scripture: A Jewish View," *The Way* (1991): 91-100.

[43] For a more detailed discussion, see Cooper, *Life is the Flesh*, 15-19.

[44] Cooper, *Life is the Flesh*, 18-19.

and unclean, or common and clean, but never common and holy. To be holy means to be set apart from the realm of the common and this can only be achieved through the ritual process of purification and sanctification. Movement through this ritual process, as Cooper points out, "was concretely typified in the three-tiered topographical layout of the Israelite camp."[45] The realm of the common and unclean lay outside the camp. Within the camp marked the realm of the common, but clean. The center of the camp, the tabernacle area, marked the clean and holy. Further topographical divisions were made between Israelites, who were common, but clean, non-Israelites, who were common and unclean, and priests who were clean and holy.[46] Rites of purification brought the common and unclean into the realm of the common and clean while the rites of sanctification brought the common and clean into the realm of the clean and holy. According to Cooper, in the rites of sanctification "holiness was communicated to the purified subject from God himself via direct physical contact with holy things and participation in the prescribed ritual act."[47]

The Leviticus account lays out the ancient Hebraic understanding of the cosmic order where between the realm of holiness and defilement, God and the evil powers, lay the common realm of the natural order. Cooper's theological works describes how movement between these two incompatible poles involves material objects and embodied practices, rituals and actions, thus confirming the importance of the material body. More germane to a discussion of spirituality, however, is an understanding of the ways in

[45] Ibid., 19.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

which these material practices, rituals, and actions operate to bring about a real state of affairs—a spiritual reality. Spirituality as daily lived experience occupies the space, lives within the tension between text and action. Performance becomes the mechanism through which and by which content, symbol systems, and text become active in the world.[48]

Ritual structures form and solidify identity through the mimetic faculty wherein performance and symbolic actions play out the tensions between the two poles.[49] The mimetic faculty, according to Taussig, describes the ability "to copy, imitate, make models, explore differences, yield into and become other" in such a way that the copy draws power from the influences of the original.[50] Mimesis becomes a means of making sense of, realizing, coping with, and brining about a reality that otherwise remains unresolved tension. Tension exists between the holy character of God and the common state of humanity, between the call of God and the response of individuals, and between the demands of the text and the obedience of the people. This marks the space of spirituality. Through embodied performance, as reflexive discourse, the act of being "set apart" becomes lived out and realized. The "what" and "how" and the "being" and "doing" are conjoined in the mimetic performance such that the cognitive function of mimesis allows for recognition of the reality being imitated, copied, or yielded into.[51] Understood in this way, the performance of and obedience to the ritual prescriptions of

[48] William O. Beeman, "Performative Symbols and their Relative Non-Arbitrariness: Representing Women in Iranian Traditional Theater," *Semiotica* 2003:145 (January 2006): 3-4.

[49] For an anthropological study of ritual performance and identity formation, see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); also Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986).

[50] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, xiii.

[51] David P. Paris, "Imitating the Parable: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25:1 (2002): 44.

the Levitical code, acts of embodied and material practices, bring to reality the conditions necessary for being brought into an exceptional and extraordinary relation to God. Bodily actions carry impact beyond the purely material; they extend into the realm of the spiritual in formative and determinative ways. The mimetic function of Israel's ritual practices served an iconic purpose, for the practices pointed beyond the mimetic act itself to an ultimate spiritual reality. This call to mimetic action continues in the New Testament where the obedience required becomes love of God and neighbor.

The New Testament: Incarnation and Mimetic Christology

Exploring the reflexive movement between spirituality and embodiment brings the New Testament account of the incarnation front and center. The body marks the locus of God's entrance into the world as the Christ. The incarnation points to the material body as the locus of God's presence, power, and revelatory actions in the world. As Johnson states, "The entire point of the incarnation is that the human body of Christ was capable of bearing and revealing the power and presence of God *somatikos* ["in the flesh"] need scarcely be argued." [52] The gospels begin with the story of Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), revealed in theological terms in John's prologue as, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). In bodily form, Bultmann notes, the Word refers not to a vocal summons but a manifestation.[53] The incarnation suggests that bodies serve as the loci for the manifestation of God's presence and power. The concept

[52] Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Revelatory Body: Notes Toward a Somatic Theology," in *The Phenomenology of the Body*, ed. Daniel J. Martino (Pittsburgh: Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center at the University of Duquesne, 2003), 80.

[53] See Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, vol. 1, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM, 1969).

of the body occupies the center of Paul's theology, for as John Robinson suggests, from its various meanings and usages all his great themes are knit together.[54] Deliverance from the body of sin and death comes by and through the body of Jesus Christ sacrificed on the cross. Those delivered are baptized into the corporate body of Christ and sustained by Christ's body in the Eucharist. Those who make up the corporate body manifest the new life of Christ in and through their bodies. Resurrection of the body into the likeness of Christ's glorious body marks the hope of every believer.[55] All of these Pauline themes draw from the body and point back to the body.

Understanding the material grounds of spirituality becomes essential, for redemptive history plays out in the material world. As Ernst Käsemann makes clear, "All God's ways with creation begin and end in corporeality" such that "the fate of the world is decided in the human sphere."[56] Actions performed in the body—the bodies of sinner and the bodies of saints, like those performed by the incarnate Christ—form, inform, and transform the spiritual and social realms.[57] As embodied beings embedded in particular material and social conditions, Christians assume "a sacred vocation through which the individual senses, limbs, and organs of one's own body are offered up entire as a sacrifice that is at once sensual and rational, 'holy and acceptable to God' (Romans 12:1)."[58]

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[54] John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 137.

[55] For a detailed description of Paul's use of "body" in the New Testament, See Robinson, *The Body*, 137.

[56] Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 18, 23.

[57] Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 37.

[58] Ibid., 36.

Incarnation and the Material Grounds of Spirituality

New Testament spirituality refers to the ways in which material reality responds to the call of the transcendent and triune God. The Apostle Paul declares to his Roman audience that all of creation groans along with humanity for the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:22-23). God's work of redemption, God's call to obedience, takes place with the material structures of human existence. The incarnation serves as the exemplary case of spirituality manifest in and through material actions, for in the incarnate flesh of Christ knowledge and practice, "being" and "doing" conjoin. In obedient response to the call of God, Christ cries out "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). The author of the letter to the Hebrews declares, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Christ serves as the ultimate standard for mimetic practice, for Christ practiced a spirituality formed in the flesh, formed through the suffering flesh, and forged through a life of practiced fidelity to the One who solicits our all.

In the tension between the call of God and human response, within the interplay of the call of the Other that beckons a move beyond the self, and the reaching out of the self in obedient response to the Other, spiritual formation occurs. The call of God is not addressed to a transcendental ego, as Chrétien points out, but to the human person as a whole, body and soul.[59] To perceive the call of God requires a sensing flesh, for the call always comes in and through the medium of material bodies. Within the practice of a true biblical spirituality, the old dichotomy between sight and hearing, the tension between the Hebrew priority of hearing and the Greek priority of sight, dissolves. The call of God,

[59] Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, 3.

like that of beauty, silently beckons from beyond the self. Beauty addresses the subject in another voice, calls out in silence, such that the eyes listen.[60] Beauty elicits a response, not in the sense of provoking a reaction; rather, as Chrétien notes, "In so far as beauty dispensed is transcendental, allocated to each thing according to its capacity to receive it, beauty constitutes as such what allows each entity to respond by offering its being and station."[61] The call creates in those called a yearning for its very source, such that, a proper response entails the giving of one's very being. To respond with "here I am, I have come to do your will" (Hebrews 10:9) presupposes a prior call to which the proper response entails the very life of the respondent—the offering of one's body as a sacrifice to the One who calls (Romans 12:1).

Incarnation and Mimetic Function

Mimetic function becomes important to spirituality for it identifies a means by which knowledge and practice conjoin in daily human experience. Knowing and doing combine in the act of mimicry allowing the recognition of the reality being mimicked.[62] Biblical spirituality, however, never concerns imitation for its own sake, never for the sake of merely presenting again; rather, true imitation always involves a transformation.[63] The Christological hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 serves as a key text for mimetic function. A call to mimetic focus opens the hymn: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ

[60] Ibid., 15-17.

[61] Ibid., 16.

[62] Paris, "Imitating the Parable," 44.

[63] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64.

Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).[64] Imitation of the divine Christ defines the purpose of the hymn's mimetic call. Responding to the call of God, presenting one's body as a living sacrifice, requires imitating the only one who has successfully done both. The call to imitate Christ refers to nothing less than adopting toward others the same attitude found in Christ—the call refers to proper social relations and ethical behaviors.[65] Knowledge of Christ comes through the practice of imitating Christ in daily experiences with others. Through imitating Christ an alternative vision of social order and relations settles deep in the body through a transformation of attitude and behavior. The exemplary response to the call of God is the embodied actions of the incarnate Christ.

Biblical spirituality never begins with the individual in isolation, for it is not an interior construction applied to the world.[66] True spirituality occupies the space of openness to an encounter with the God; that is, lived spirituality resides within the breech, within the reflexive relationship of openness to an encounter with God in which self-discovery and ultimate value are realized. Knowledge of God becomes intimately tied to our relationships, always mediated, thus the other becomes indispensable to a relationship with God.[67] The creation story and the incarnation reveal this point most clearly. The call of God, the voice that solicits our response, always arrives through the other—through the friend, enemy, widow, orphan, or the stranger. Through mimetic

[64] See Corne J. Bekker, "Sharing the Incarnation: Towards a Model of Mimetic Christological Leadership," *Biblical Perspectives* (May 2007): 1-18.

[65] See David Alan Black, "The Discourse Structure of Philippians: A Study in Text Linguistics," *Novum Testamentum* XXXVII, 1 (1995): 16-49.

[66] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 77-79.

[67] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.

practice, imitating the attitude of Christ, the response “here I am” is offered in obedient response to the call. The Church, the body of Christ, becomes the place where these practices find fullest expression. The corporeal body finds ultimate meaning, defines itself, in and through the corporate body.

CHAPTER 6

IN(CORP)ORATION: BODIES AND SOCIAL BODIES

The previous chapter maintains that embodiment forms an essential and indispensable element of biblical spirituality. Narrative accounts in Scripture depict spirituality as a lived reality embedded in material conditions and practiced in material bodies. These daily material practices center around the call and presence of God and, as such, spiritual reality opens up to and through these daily material routines and practices. As lived experience, biblical spirituality requires attention to the ways in which bodies and material conditions play key roles in making sense of spiritual experience. The embodied self always already stands confronted by a call which originates from beyond the self and takes the form of an encounter that opens a space for discovery and self-discovery. Spiritual meaning, like all meaning, arises out of a reflexive interplay in which self and other enter a co-constitutive relationship. As such, the meaning ascribed to the encounter never comes as a private and individual exercise of the mind, for meaning and identity never float free of external influences, but always come mediated through

determinants already operative within social bodies.[1] The perceiving subject always already occupies a communal space, as James K.A. Smith notes, "The 'I' that perceives is always already a 'we.' My perception is communal, a debt I owe."[2] Never a disembodied act, perceiving takes place within the interplay of self and other as bodies that share a profound sociality of interaction where meaning arises from the intermingling of subjects, consciousness, and corporalities.[3] There is simply no escaping the profound and pervasive formative influence of embodiment and embeddedness on understanding—physical bodies and social bodies are always intimately intertwined in the act of making meaning.[4] In this chapter I will develop the claim that a consistent and coherent spirituality can only develop within the boundaries of institutional religion; that is, I will argue that Christian spirituality must be rooted in the embodied believing community.[5]

In(corp)oration and Context: Producing Meaning

Commenting on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, Smith notes, "To be in*corp*orated is to be knit into the social body and to have the community's *habitus*

[1] Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott, "Putting the Body's Feet on the Ground: Towards a Sociological Reconceptualization of Gendered and Sexual Embodiment," in *Constructing Gendered Bodies*, eds. Kathryn Backett-Milburn and Linda McKie (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 9-24.

[2] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 84.

[3] See Olga Belova, "The Event of Seeing: A Phenomenological Perspective on Visual Sense-Making," *Culture and Organization* 12:2 (June 2006): 105.

[4] Raymond W. Gibbs, *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36-39; Elizabeth Lewis Hall, "What are Bodies for? An Integrative Examination of Embodiment," *Scholars Review* 39:2 (2010): 161.

[5] For a discussion of the importance of the believing community to Christian spirituality, see Sandra M. Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Horizons* 13:2 (1986): 266.

inscribed in my body."[6] The term for Bourdieu, refers to a set of dispositions which incline agents to act in certain ways.[7] Thus, the idea of *habitus* refers to a practical sense, it refers to those habituated inclinations that spawn meaningful action in the world—it describes an embodied know-how carried within and communicated through a community of practice.[8] Sweetman notes further, that "*habitus* refers to our overall orientation to or way of being in the world; our predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving in and through the social environment that encompasses posture, demeanor, outlook, expectations and tastes."[9] The body carries this *habitus*, it is in and through the body that the personal and social combine; thus, according to Bourdieu, the body marks the site of this "incorporated history."[10] These habituated dispositions inscribed in the body generate practices, perceptions, and attitudes that become regular and normative without being governed by a conscious rule. As such, *habitus* serves as the condition of possibility making a range of perceptual experiences possible.

Perception can be understood then as both conditioned and conditional and, as such, meaning becomes the product of the reflexive interactions of the perceiving subject and already existing determinant structures. In which case, as Smith suggests, "The

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[6] See Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 82. The idea of in*corp*oration comes from footnote 15 on page 82 of Smith's *Imagining the Kingdom*.

[7] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[8] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 84.

[9] Paul Sweetman, "Revealing Habitus, Illuminating Practice: Bourdieu, Photography and Visual Methods," *The Sociological Review* 57:3 (2009): 496.

[10] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 93-94.

habitus both governs and enables perception."[11] Given the importance of bodily practice and bodily know-how to the making of meaning, Smith entertains the idea of shifting the goal of Christian education and formation away from the mere acquisition of a Christian world-view towards the acquisition of a Christian *habitus*.[12] This shift seems essential to developing a healthy and biblical embodied spirituality and, as Smith clearly articulates, requires a practicing community.

Spiritual formation as a fundamental orientation to the world is lived out, not simply thought out, and since grounded in day to day practices it becomes a way of life oriented toward formative action. A spirituality grounded in material actions, lived in the flesh, carried in the joints and marrow of bodies, becomes tangible, practical and capable of making sense of spiritual formation. This shift would, as Smith points out, require the Church "to attend to the nexus of belief and the body."[13] In other words, providing the appropriate contexts for the development of a Christian *habitus* requires an understanding of the important connections between the body and the production of meaning and beliefs. This proves important to spirituality in light of recent developments emerging from the social sciences which suggest that particular aspects of spiritual traditions are initially embodied in people and grow out of the daily practices of life, as opposed to beginning in doctrine and growing out of prior beliefs and abstract ideas.[14] The idea that traditions are influenced and even formed by embodied practices presupposes a

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[11] See Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 80-84.

[12] Ibid., 84.

[13] Ibid., 84.

[14] See Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 33; C. Kourie and T. J. Ruthenberg, "Contemporary Christian Spirituality: A Worldly Embodiment," *Koers* 73:2 (2008): 309.

practicing community; likewise, the very notion of *habitus* requires a practicing community.

Meaning: Never "Mine" but Always Already "Ours"

Probably the most debilitating misconception about spirituality in contemporary western culture arises out of the belief that biblical spirituality, because private and interior, can be practiced without reference to or dependence upon a biblical faith tradition. An embodied spirituality proves attractive to a somaticized culture partly because a lived spirituality intends to address the ways in which the spiritual can be experienced in the mundane practices of daily bodily life. Divorced from the practicing community, however, a serious issue arises concerning the appropriation and articulation of these experiences. If the perceiving "I" is always already a "we" imbedded in communal understanding, then experience can never be simply "mine" but always already also "ours."[15] To be meaningful at all, experience must be given some content and the interpretive contexts will always determine that content.

Human experience always entails an act of interpretation which occurs within pre-established social structures that provide the concepts and paradigms necessary to interpretation.[16] Spirituality proves no exception, for it cannot escape the influence of cultural and historical traditions in shaping experience. This is precisely where the warning of subversive narratives and practices become germane to spiritual experience, for spiritual experience will be interpreted through some socially established conceptual

[15] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 84; George Schner, S.J., "The Appeal to Experience," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 48.

[16] See Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 259-264.

frame. Too often the conceptual framework or paradigm through which spiritual experience gets interpreted lacks any fidelity to the biblical narrative, but make no mistake, interpretations will always be loyal to some interest—whether corporate capitalism or some other. Interpretations are always theory laden and dependent on established structures of meaning, therefore, providing the appropriate contexts for making sense of spiritual experience becomes essential.

Faith Traditions: Providing Appropriate Contexts for Spirituality

The encounter between self and other—between the self and the Transcendent—originates with a call that elicits a relational response that creates a space for self-transcendence and self-discovery. This space open to encounter and self-transcendence marks the site of spiritual experience—to experience is to encounter, to participate in the event—but the experience must be provided with meaning. Outside of a faith tradition such experience too often lacks the interpretive structures necessary for constructing true biblical meaning. As such, personal spirituality unaffiliated with a faith community lacks the tested wisdom of tradition; it lacks the formative structures which accommodate coherent integration, thus it becomes subject to fragmentation and relativism.[17] When conceived of primarily as a matter of private and interior concern, Schneiders notes, personal spirituality "composed of a variety of intrinsically unrelated practices must draw on equally unrelated beliefs to sustain and guide it."[18] Additionally, Roof points out, that spirituality recast in strictly privatized and psychological terms loses its moorings in

[17] For a discussion of the relationship between religion and spirituality, see Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality: A Contemporary Conundrum," *Spiritus* 3 (Fall 2003): 173-185.

[18] Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality," 176.

traditional religious community so important to cultivating spirituality and thus becomes weakened and fragmented.[19] Untethered from tradition and floating free of proper interpretive structures private spirituality amounts to nothing more than a syncretistic postmodern bricolage. It may indeed respond well to current felt needs, but it has no roots, no past nor future, and lacks the critical and historical reflection of a tested wisdom tradition through which it might become coherent and consistent.[20] The established beliefs and practices of a faith tradition, therefore, provide the appropriate contexts for shaping spiritual meaning.

A major part of the Church's structure of belief takes the form of a systematic theology. Schneiders aptly points out, "The consistency of a thoughtful and critical systematic theology is a crucial structural support for the faith and morality that are integral to any spirituality."[21]Structural support becomes important precisely because believing in and following Christ never take place in the abstract, but always in the concrete as specific beliefs and practices by means of which spiritual formation occurs.[22] The concrete beliefs and practices of a religious community, what Frohlich refers to as "constructed expressions of human meaning," are therefore essential for making sense of spiritual experience since these are the actual, concrete beliefs and practices that shape

[19] See Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 109.

[20] Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality," 177.

[21] Ibid. For further discussion of the relationship between spirituality and theology, see J. Matthew Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality: The Relationship Between Theology and Spirituality," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, eds. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 159-170; William Thompson, *Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987); Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

[22] Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality," 166.

our understanding of reality.[23] Tested faith traditions, then, prove much more adequate matrices for interpreting spiritual experience and practice than does personally constructed composites of beliefs and practices. Thus, spirituality becomes as much communal as personal, for community provides the necessary context for a wise and sustained spirituality. [24] The Church provides the essential context—provides the matrices—through which lived spiritual experience develops into a meaningful biblical spirituality.

The claim that the traditional beliefs and practices of religion are essential to the production of spiritual experience requires a note of caution however, for to claim that the Church provides an appropriate theological context for interpreting spiritual experience in no way implies a rigid and preordained dogmatism subverting and subjugating all experience. Theological context conceived more broadly can refer to reflection upon the faith community's inherited tradition as well as its present experience of God. As such, it may be argued that theology has an implicit constitutive relationship with spirituality and cannot be properly understood without taking this into account.[25] In other words, spiritual experience engages a transformational dialectic between self and other—between the transcendent and constructed elements—such that experience is never "only" mine, but already "also" ours.[26] Making sense of spiritual experience,

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[23] Mary Frohlich, R.S.C.J., "Spiritual Discipline, Discipline of Spirituality: Revisiting the Questions of Definition and Method," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, eds. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 71.

[24] Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality," 176.

[25] Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality," 165.

[26] Frohlich, "Spiritual Discipline," 69.

therefore, takes the form of dialectic between the self and existing structures of meaning which provides a range of interpretive possibilities.

In(corp)oration and Context: Shaping Experience

Experience seems always subjective, always interior as "my experience," and always irreducible. As "my experience" meaning becomes reduced to and determined by an act of autonomous mental processes. This modern construal of experience in terms of individual, oppositional, and self-authenticating mental operations derives from the idea of a self-determining human rationality dependent upon interior and exterior senses.[27] In this case, a personal spirituality may be conceived of as an expression of personal spiritual experience defined in terms of the self. Problems arise, however, when using a phrase like "my experience" to claim uniqueness or irreducibility.[28] Suspicion about an autonomous and pure reason as the origin and principle determinant of knowledge has already been raised by Nietzsche; critical as he was that reason alone determines the meaning inherent in experience.

For Nietzsche, any unqualified appeal to experience betrays a naiveté unless understood within the context of the social and cultural determinants of experience.[29] An appeal to experience therefore, as George Schner argues, "must include a retrieval of the inevitable presence of interpretation and tradition in even the simplest of appeals to my

[27] See George Schner, S.J., "The Appeal to Experience," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 40-59.

[28] Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," 48.

[29] Ibid., 42.

experience."[30] It might be argued, then, that spirituality can never be reduced to a mere expression of spiritual experience. George Lindbeck raises a similar claim regarding religion when he suggests that religions produce or shape experience rather than being the expressions of experience. Language and symbol, according to Lindbeck, serve as necessary preconditions for feeling and experience.[31] Of course, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model simply reverses the relation of inner and outer dichotomy so that the inner becomes derivative of the outer.[32] The tenacious nature of the either/or dichotomy of "inner" verse "outer" problematizes the study of spiritual experience. It leaves in question the authoritative force of inner experience in relation to outer social structures. The very idea of an autonomous inner experience has been critically challenged, but simply reversing the hierarchy within the dichotomy may not be the answer. For this reason it becomes necessary to find a means to collapse the dichotomy.

The modern notion of the subject as "inside" and the world as "outside" no longer serves as a constructive metaphor, for it has been dismantled by the philosophical investigations of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Bourdieu. These thinkers move away from the modern preoccupation with the subject and return again to a more premodern emphasis on forms of mediation.[33] For them, then, any investigation into the nature of experience must involve the study of the various social structures—such as

[30] Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," 42.

[31] See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 40. Also, Owen C. Thomas, "Theology and Experience," *The Harvard Theological Review* 78 (January-April 1985): 193.

[32] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 34.

[33] Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," 42.

language, symbols, power structures, bodies, and culture—through which experience is mediated.[34] By returning to the notion of embodiment as a methodological principle for collapsing dualities it becomes possible to address more fully the nature of experience as constitutive of both inner and outer without merely reversing the priority within the dualism.

Bodies and Social Bodies: Experience as Transformational Dialectic

Embodiment refers to the essentially relational nature of our being-in-the-world, it refers to the ways in which physical bodies accommodate the social environment, learn how to relate to others, and learn to understand the actions, sensations, and emotions of others.[35] Humans learn and create meaning through the mimetic function of imitating the actions and behaviors of others. The "I" is always already embedded within a complex of structures which shape thought and experience. In referencing "my experience" one at once realizes a construction dependent on and shaped by a complex of social structures and activities. Structures that produce and shape "my experience" are the same social structures that provide language, shape attitudes, and establish values through embodied practices. In this sense no experience is strictly "mine."[36] Experience enters a dialectical relationship between self and other in which the give and take of position and counter

[34] Ibid.

[35] See Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Erik Thoennes, "At Home in Our Bodies: Implications of the Incarnation for Embodiment," *Christian Scholars Review* 36.1 (2006): 29-46.

[36] Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," 48.

position, opinion and opposing opinion, become co-constitutive elements in creating the potential for sense, reference, and meaning.[37]

George Schner offers an insightful way of understanding the use of experience in theological reflection with his idea of "the appeal constructive."[38] In the appeal constructive, Schner claims, experience neither possesses the inevitability of a transcendental condition of human nature, nor the relativity of a social construction. As such, experience enters theological reflection without imposing a universal structure independent of faith communities, or without emptying itself of all norming authority.[39] The transformational dialectic between the experiencing self and the faith community avoids the dogmatic imposition of ascribing fixed meaning on the one hand and deteriorating into fragmentation and relativism on the other. Thus, perceptions of experience are conditioned by the theological structures operative within the faith community, but these structures establish the condition of possibility for interpretive interaction thus creating a space for spontaneous and improvised responses to the experience.

The Faith Community and Improvisational Action

Perception and action while conditioned and conditional can still be spontaneous and improvisational. The capacity to improvise arises out of the social learning process in

[37] Ibid., 46-48.

[38] Ibid., 54.

[39] Ibid., 54-55.

which social norms and expectations are internalized through practice.[40] In fact, Bourdieu indicates, that *habitus* makes possible and results in "regulated improvisations."[41] Schner argues similarly concerning change when he claims that effecting change necessitates experience enter into a dialectical relation with already operative determinants.[42] In other words, experience makes change possible, but change necessitates a prior structure to which experience can interact. Thus, an already operative structuring structure does not restrict the range of experience; rather, it serves as the condition of possibility for experience.[43] Likewise, the theological structures operative in faith communities establish the condition of possibility for improvisation.

Spiritually formative actions can be performed as unconscious improvisations arising spontaneously and not merely in conscious response to learned rules or doctrine. Improvisation becomes possible, however, only when the unconscious dispositions of *habitus* are inscribed in the body through habituation. Repeated performances of particular repertoires internalize norms and expectations such that spontaneous improvisation becomes possible. Spiritual formation can involve improvisational action, but this requires the development and establishment of a Christian *habitus* making possible regulated actions.

Spiritual experience as a form of encounter with the divine originates as response to a call. The encounter marks the moment of transformation, it is interruptive and

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[40] See Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 84.

[41] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

[42] Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," 54.

[43] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 84.

disruptive, it creates a discontinuity demanding consideration, revision, and change. By embodying spirituality, the encounter creates a space for bodily improvisation, that is, a space to fabricate something out of material already at hand.[44] In this sense, embodied spirituality becomes mimetic, transformative, intended to form and create something new in response to the divine call. As improvised performance, embodied spirituality becomes an act of worship and sacrifice (Romans 12:1). As Benson notes, however, "The improvised response is always a repetition and improvisation."[45]

The call invites the respondent to join something already in progress, to take on, in Bourdieu's terms, a *habitus* making possible "regulated improvisations."[46] Such improvisations are regulated, Benson notes, by the constraints that make them particularly Christian, by the Christian context in which the improvisations takes place, and by the Christian scriptures as traditionally interpreted within a community of faith.[47] Thus, what MacIntyre claims of practices might also be said of improvisations; to enter into improvisation is to enter into a relationship not only with contemporary practitioners, but also those practitioners who have proceeded and extended the reach of improvisational practice to the present.[48] Thus, spirituality as embodied practice becomes the condition for the possibility of regulated improvisations in which spiritual experience enters theological reflection dialogically within the faith community. The kind of

[44] See Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life*, 26, 40-45.

[45] Ibid., 40.

[46] Ibid. See also Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

[47] See Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life*, 40-45.

[48] For a discussion of practices in moral theory, See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 194.

spirituality discussed here results from a deep desire—a passionate longing—for God. Desire needs to be shaped and directed to its proper end, however, and this requires a faith community yielding to the formative influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In(corp)oration: An Alternative Community of Desire

Within the teachings and practices of the faith community the incarnate Christ is made known and becomes the model for mimetic practice. The desire of the Son for the Father; revealed in the desire of Christ to perform the will of God faithfully, to make the presence and power of God manifest to the world in his body, to offer himself up bodily for the sake of the other, becomes the model for the mimetic desire of each believer. Spirituality centers on desire.[49] Desire need not be viewed negatively, and it need not be detached from the body—in fact, it cannot be detached from the body. The erotic, so often shunned because so closely linked to sexuality, can be thought more broadly, Sheldrake notes, "as that passionate, specific and partly physical energy that lies behind other loves and deep commitments."[50] To practice the highest form of desire, as with the highest form of love, is to be drawn into the life of God. The purpose of the Church entails the formation of just this kind of desire.

The literary critic René Girard puts forth the convincing claim that the source of desire can never be the self alone, for desire arises as a product of the social world. Since human beings are not disembodied egos, but rather embodied beings embedded in a social world, the body becomes imitatively drawn into the life of the social other. The

[49] See Philip Sheldrake, *Befriending our Desires* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 25.

[50] Ibid.

same social and cultural forces that shape meaning and identity are responsible for shaping desire. In other words, the other moves me to desire, to want, and to act, in such a way that the desire of the other becomes the source of my desire. Imitating the other to the point of desiring what the other desires results in competition with the other over the object of desire.[51] The result, according to Girard, is mimetic violence.[52] Since this violence can be destructive to society, it must be purged; hence, the need for a sacrificial victim upon whom to foist the blame.[53] Once the victim is sacrificed the violence threatening social stability subsides and harmony restores for the moment.[54] This same sort of mimetic violence drives the earthly economy of exchange and perpetuates a violent cycle of use and abuse.

Empathy, Incarnation, and Kenosis

The Church serves as an alternative society of desire; a new social order in which desire as mimetic violence can be broken. As such, involvement in the life of the Church means to have the body drawn imitatively into an alternate society in which an economy of love and empathy replaces the economy of exchange. Thus, creating the means whereby imitating the life of Christ and others who faithfully practice a desire for God's presence and purpose transforms mimetic practice into spiritual formation. Christ reverses this cycle of violence by willfully taking on the role of victim—assuming the

[51] James R. Mensch, "Prayer as Kenosis," in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, ed. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norma Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 70.

[52] See René Girard, "Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism," in *The Girard Reader*, ed. James Williams (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1996).

[53] See René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1986).

[54] Girard, "Mimesis and Violence," 12.

sins and guilt of others for their sake. As such, Christ undoes the harm done by mimetic violence by refusing to foist blame and instead assumes responsibility for the other. Thus, the formative practices of the Church should inscribe in the practitioner this same love and responsibility for the other.

Creating practices that foster imitation of the life of Christ means the Church must take serious the notions of incarnation and kenosis. As a social order in which a new desire is instantiated in and through the bodies of believers by means of material practices, incarnation becomes the primary mimetic model. Imitating the life of Christ requires sharing in the love of Christ for the world, and this requires empathy—the ability to feel for, in, and through the other. "At its most basic level," Mensch claims, "empathy is bodily."[55] As such, empathy involves a self-emptying and a reception of the other in a way that does not demand reciprocity, but reaches out to the other at the risk of unrequited love.

[55] Mensch, "Prayer as Kenosis," 69.

PART FOUR

THE PERFORMING BODY: *HABITUS* AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

CHAPTER 7

SPIRITUALITY IN THE FLESH: BELIEF, MEMORY, AND TIME

The previous chapter points out the embodied and materially embedded nature of biblical spirituality and suggests that Christian spiritual formation requires the structures of a tested faith community in order to develop properly. Since Christian formation involves a sanctifying process understood in terms of daily lived practice, it never occurs in the abstract but always through a set of concrete practices and beliefs by means of which spiritual growth takes place. A consistent and coherent set of beliefs and practices are made possible through the matrices of a tested faith tradition through which they are interpreted and become meaningful. In this way, the believing community establishes a *habitus* that provides an alternative orientation to the world; one which stands opposed to the imposition of formative structures that subvert biblical spirituality through practices antithetical to Christ like character. Thus, it will no longer suffice for the Church to focus its concern primarily on what people believe, but must also attend to what people practice. In fact, for the Church to address the idea of a Christian *habitus* in a serious manner, it must first rethink the relationship between belief and practice.

Embodying Belief: Rethinking Belief as a Practice

In modern culture belief typically gets reduced to mental ascent to or cognitive appropriation of propositional content and, as such, remains independent of the body and bodily practice. Arguments in favor of the priority of belief over practice proceed from the idea that the content of the belief (doctrine, dogma, program, and the like) precedes practice and provides it with shape and meaning. The underlying assumption holds that practice is blind without a prior principle in which to evaluate it.[1] Even those, like William Frankena, who want to deny a hard and fast distinction between "doing" and "being" relative to moral theory, tend to prioritize principle over practice.[2] This does, however, impose an unnecessary tension between belief and practice in which the importance of belief often gets prioritized to the neglect of practice. It might be claimed, however, that practice often proceeds and becomes the precondition for establishing belief. This should not be surprising given the importance of embodiment and, in fact, embodiment serves as the grounds for rethinking the relationship between belief and practice.

Michel de Certeau: Belief as an Act

In his examination of sixteenth and seventeenth century mysticism, de Certeau, challenges contemporary notions of mysticism as a spirituality disembodied and detached

[1] William Frankena makes a similar claim in his critique of virtue ethics where he argues that traits without principles are blind. Frankena draws a clear distinction between principles and traits or dispositions and argues that only by a prior principle can a disposition be evaluated. See William Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 63-71.

[2] Frankena does make the claim that dispositions are necessary if principles are to be potent, but this merely insists on the necessity to practice what is imperative in the principle. See Frankena, *Ethics*, 63-71.

from the world. His writings demonstrate the embodied and social nature of mysticism as a religious life in which practices often become formative preconditions for beliefs and interpretations of doctrine.[3] Within the shattered Christendom of the sixteenth and seventeenth century centuries, what became essential for these often marginalized social groups, according to de Certeau, was not so much a body of doctrine, "but the epistemic foundation of a domain within which specific procedures are followed: a new space, with new mechanisms."[4] The mystic's ability to reinterpret tradition in light of changing circumstances, de Certeau suggests, was characterized by a set of procedures which allowed a new treatment of language—ways of acting became the guide for the creation of a body of mystical writings.[5] Mysticism, then, understood as social practice rather than subjective experience, pointed toward a different approach to the Christian tradition in which the emphasis was less on a set of structures or doctrines than on bodily practice and action.[6]

For de Certeau, the separation of belief as an act of cultural practice from the object of belief becomes symptomatic of the modern condition.[7] Thus, given the important role of practice to the development of beliefs in early mysticism, de Certeau develops the notion of believing as practice. In this sense, belief is not understood as the

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[3] See Michel de Certeau, "Mystic Speech," in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

[4] Ibid., 188-189.

[5] Ibid., 189.

[6] Philip F. Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010), 115-116.

[7] For a more detailed discussion of De Certeau's thought on belief and practice, see Ian Buchanan, *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist* (London: SAGE, 2000), 86-107.

content of a doctrine or proposition, but as an act.[8] Belief becomes then, for de Certeau, "the investiture of subjects in a proposition, the act of uttering it while holding it to be true…a modality of the affirmation rather than its content."[9] The importance of de Certeau's work to any discussion of embodied spirituality centers on his emphasis on the important interplay between bodily practices and the establishing of beliefs. Rethinking belief as an embodied act opens up dialogue for further investigation into the importance of the body to spiritual formation.

Pierre Bourdieu: Belief as a State of the Body

Likewise, Bourdieu emphasizes the embodied nature of belief by defining practical belief not as a "state of mind" or adherence to the content of dogma or doctrine; but rather, as a "state of the body."[10] Defined in this way, belief is not the cognitive assent to propositions, but describes a functional embodied understanding of the world.[11] Practical belief constitutes a direct adherence established in practice between a *habitus* and a structure or particular set of relationships.[12] As such, enacted belief takes the form of bodily memory in which learning instills in the body like a "memory pad" or "as a

[8] Claire E. Wolfteich, "Practice of 'Unsaying': Michel de Certeau, Spirituality Studies, and Practical Theology," *Spiritus* 12 (2012): 164.

[9] Michel de Certeau, "Believing and Making People Believe," in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 120.

[10] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 68.

[11] For a more detailed discussion, see Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 84-92.

[12] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 68-69. The structure or set of particular relationships Bourdieu refers to as "fields."

repository of the most precious values."[13] Not only the mundane beliefs of daily life are carried in the body, according to Bourdieu, but the most important and fundamental beliefs about life are as well.

Bourdieu has now made it possible to move a step further by introducing the idea of bodily memory. Rethinking belief otherwise than mere cognitive apprehension independent of bodily practices, as de Certeau and Bourdieu do, marks a significant gain for understanding spirituality as lived experience. But now, however, by expanding Bourdieu's notion of bodily memory it becomes possible to develop a sense of memory, not as a gathering of past events in thought, but as the dynamic and lived source of an always actual meaning. In this sense, a Christian *habitus* becomes imperative to inscribing in the body a memory of the historical faith and practices of the biblical tradition.

Embodied Memory: Revelation, History, and the Call to Remember

Because God's self-revelation takes place in history, reception of this revelation takes the form of memory. As one of the most repeated imperatives in the Bible, "Remember!" (*Zakhor*) demands our attention.[14] "The call to remember," Yerushalmi notes, "does not arise from a curiosity about the past."[15] Which means, remembering cannot be reduced to simply recalling the past as something already elapsed, for the call to remember becomes an invitation to a particular way of being. Heidegger picks up on

[13] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 69.

[14] For a detailed discussion, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 5. Yerushalmi notes that *Zakhor* appears 169 times in the biblical texts.

[15] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 6.

this and recognizes the need to think memory otherwise than as a faculty for the past, but he fails to solicit help from Greek thought in developing his idea.[16] The reason for this, Zarader points out, is because the typical Greek determination of memory makes of it a faculty for the past and, as such, it corresponds with the representation of history as a succession of chronological events.[17] Modern Christianity borrows its primary understanding of memory and history from Greek thought. Heidegger wants to interpret memory otherwise however, not as one faculty among others, but as a manner of existing—as the "gathering of faithful thought."[18] Defined in this way, Zarader clearly notes, memory "appears as a collection and focusing of the entire soul upon all of presence, a presence that includes the past, but not as something elapsed."[19]

The idea of history as that which governs and passes through the present in the form of memory and serves as the source of an always actual meaning delineates the Old Testament Jewish universe. Conceived of in this way, history is not simply that which has past as events now complete, but that which extends into the present and stretches forth into the future. As such, the very call of God "to be" becomes the call of God to remember, in which case memory takes the form of fidelity. Zarader claims, "Memory is indeed fidelity, but fidelity to a history gathered, at every instant, into the unity of presence, and which can be so because it is fundamentally oriented toward the future."[20]

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[16] See Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[17] See Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 77.

[18] Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* 11.

[19] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 77.

[20] Ibid.

Memory then becomes, as Heidegger understood, a gathering around a temporal totality—itself alive at every instant.[21] Bourdeau makes it possible to situate this memory in the body as communal memory by means of *habitus*, thus opening the possibility for understanding the bodily enactment of this communal memory as the means by which the call of God becomes always present. Thus, the call of God remains always already presence—alive in the embodied memory of the believing community by means of embodied practices. The bodily practice by which the Church seeks to live out the call to remember is the liturgy.

Liturgical Bodies and Historical Memory

The liturgical body can be understood as human physicality itself.[22] Bodies of flesh carry the historical memory and bodies of flesh enact it in the form of liturgical practices.[23] Such a statement should not be taken to imply an endorsement of the individualism that has so plagued the Christian Church, however, for understanding the liturgical body as human physicality denies any notion of detached and disembodied inner selves as the source of spiritual experience and meaning. Any thoughtful reflection on human embodiment, with all its vulnerabilities and limitations, leads directly to consideration of other bodies.[24] Returning to embodiment, that often frail and always

[21] Ibid.

[22] Colleen M. Griffith, "Spirituality and the Body," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 67.

[23] Here I do not intend liturgy to be understood in an instrumental sense; rather, I want to understand liturgy as dialectical—as worship. In this sense worshipers are changed by liturgy and liturgy is changed through its performance—there is a mutual influence and shaping that takes place between belief and worship. See Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1984), 75.

[24] Griffith, "Spirituality and the Body," 67.

limited and vulnerable condition of being human, forces us to reclaim our interdependence on God and others. The hope of the Church, carried in vulnerable bodies and expressed in liturgy, is nothing other than the presence of the God who creates and sustains all bodies. Liturgy becomes the means, therefore, by which the corporate community lives within the hope and practices the presence of God in the world.

The embodied rites and ritual practices of the liturgical year—in the form of Christian worship—bear continual witness to the presence and powerful acts of God in history. The rite repeats annually, but it repeats a singular event that occurred in a particular place in the world at a particular time in history, thus the rite marks a celebration not so much of the natural year, but of the historical memory.[25] Within historical memory, the acts of God in history are made present and alive through embodied actions and in accord with traditional communal understandings. Liturgy, therefore, is a communal happening.[26] Two things are of particular importance here: the embodied ritual action through which historical memory is enacted and the communal ritual structure through which the act is made meaningful.

Since the revelation of God never comes unmediated, liturgical practices of the interpreting community become essential for making the revelatory event present. Sheldrake notes, "The only spirituality that is accessible is incarnational—mediated through the cultural and contextual overlays we inevitably bring to nature and our

[25] See Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 76.

[26] Griffith, "Spirituality and the Body," 67.

understanding of the sacred."[27] Thus, every religious rite and ritual is approached by means of a particular *habitus*, a way of reading the world that has accumulated over time.[28] Accumulated in the body in the form of embodied memory, God's revelatory encounters continue through time carried in the bodies of the believing community through liturgical practices.

Liturgy requires both individual bodies and a social body, as Schmemam notes, the original meaning of the word connotes "an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals."[29] It can also mean a function or ministry performed on behalf of and in the interest of the whole community.[30] As such, liturgy becomes the embodied enactment of a historical communal memory making present the call of God to the world. Understood in this sense, liturgy defines a way of being-in-the-world, for it serves as a response to the call to remember. Liturgy becomes a remembrance carried in the social body and instantiated in the bodies of the individuals who form the community. It has often been neglected or ignored, however, because it has been so often misunderstood. When addressed in cultic terms, as delineating a sacred act of worship, liturgy can lose touch with the reality of its material embeddedness in place and time.

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[27] Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 16. Sheldrake makes this claim in reference to how place is related to memory and human identity.

[28] Belden Lane makes this argument in reference to sacred places claiming that every habitat is approached by means of a particular *habitus*. See Belden Lane, "Review of Schama, Landscape and Memory," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 4:1 (Summer 1996): 31.

[29] Schmemam, *For the Life of the World*, 25.

[30] Ibid.

Sacred Time and Liturgical Cycles: *Kairos* the Theater of the Encounter

The modern western world operates according to chronological time in which a sequential series of "now" moments move unidirectionally into the future in a manner that becomes non-repeatable. *Kairos* time, on the other hand, refers to an event or encounter in which God acts (e.g. Mark 1:15, "the time (*kairos*) has come"), it is qualitative rather than quantitative, both multidirectional and repeatable; it marks a propitious moment for response and decision. The liturgical cycles of feasts, seasons, and prayers are intended to immerse the Church in a time of liturgical celebration, thus creating a moment in which the call of God to remember opens to a welcoming. *Kairos* time, however, should not be understood as somehow removed from materiality, it is not some abstract means of escaping the world, but rather defines a way of being-in-the-world—an openness and welcome receptivity to the encounter. When liturgy becomes an abstract feature of Christian worship, understood as a sacred act of worship limited to the sanctuary on Sunday morning, it loses touch with the broad reach of *kairos*.

Kairos as the Apostle Paul uses the term has its roots in the Hebraic conception of time understood on the basis of the event.[31] In this view of time, the present cannot be reduced to a "now" as a pure sequential moment; rather, the present marks the site in which all of time gathers in the modality of unity.[32] The present defines the time of responsibility and response, for in *kairos* the call always already addresses me. "The present," Zarader notes, "is this encounter between the injunction with which the

[31] Zarader, *The Unthought Debt*, 165.

[32] Ibid.

temporal event is charged and the welcome I give it."[33] In this sense, history becomes the theater of revelation as encounter, a specific domain of existence in which the present becomes the time of decision and responsibility for the future. The call does not echo from the past as something already complete, but arrives from the future as an invitation to encounter. Receptivity to the encounter, however, requires preparation—a making ready by means of self-emptying.

Liturgy as Preparation: Kenosis as Receptivity

Openness to the encounter with God, welcome receptivity to the call, marks the space of spirituality. Not a space outside of time, or outside of the body, or an otherworldly space, but space created by and in time and approached by means of liturgical practices. Preparation for the reception of God's presence, conditioning the welcome of God, takes place within liturgical practices as the enactment of communal historical memory. Preparing one's self for the encounter, living within expectation and hope, becomes an orientation to the world—a way of being-in-the-world. It necessarily involves the body since it involves a disposition of the body to inhabit its world in a certain way. In this case, having absorbed a particular *habitus*, everyday embodied actions are oriented toward the event. The event to which history always points can be none other than this revelatory encounter with God. Providing a place for encounter, however, requires conditioning—it requires a self-emptying. Not in the form of abandonment of the body, not escape from the material world, but an emptying of self-

[33] Ibid., 166.

will, of attitudes and dispositions that refuse an encounter with the sacred. Self-emptying, in other words, becomes a form of receptivity.[34]

If Christ serves as the paradigmatic mimetic example of a proper relation to God, then both self-emptying and receptivity are involved (Philippians 2: 5-11). Incarnation requires a self-emptying in which Christ gives up self-will to the will of God (Luke 22:42), and in doing so becomes able to declare his readiness to live out the call (Hebrews 10:9). Thus, to engage in practices that bring one into a proper relation with God requires a self-emptying so as to provide a space for the divine encounter.[35] The fundamental questions to be answered, then, concern the manner and purpose of the encounter.

Divine Encounter: Spiritual Formation as Responsibility

Addressing the manner in which an encounter with God becomes possible can be complex and controversial, but the purpose here is not the theological and philosophical nuances of the arguments. What concerns this discussion is the manner in which God encounters us as a call to spiritual formation. In other words, the issue centers on the means by which God presences as a divine imperative to direct actions and behaviors toward certain ends. It has already been claimed that the historical encounters of God are kept alive in the communal historical memory of the believing community. In this way, God becomes present in and through the liturgical enactment of the historical memory and, as such, the call of God to remember always already confronts us as responsibility.

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[34] James R. Mensch, "Prayer as Kenosis," in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, ed. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norma Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 67.

[35] Ibid., 67-68.

The call to remember, however, cannot merely be an injunction to cognitive recall but must be understood as an imperative to act. The call to remember the poor, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, constitutes a call to act on their behalf.

Responsibility: The Call of God and the Face of the Other

Spiritual formation can never be optional, for persons are always already embedded in social structures that form meaning and identity at a pre-reflective level across all spheres of existence—formation occurs without consent. While it can be neglected, spiritual formation cannot be optional for another reason, it comes as an imperative within the divine call. Spiritual formation, as it has been presented in this work, becomes a response to the call of God to a certain way of being in the word. It cannot be a private and interior matter precisely because it comes as a call away from the self toward a responsibility to the other. Spiritual formation simply means to take purposeful and meaningful action toward forming and transforming the spiritual sphere of human existence in order to fulfill that responsibility. The spiritual sphere, however, must not be conceived as a sphere of existence separate from and indifferent to the other spheres of human existence for, as Sheldrake has noted, "The only spirituality that is accessible is incarnational."[36] The call of God comes to me, confronts me, incarnated as it were, in the face of the other—in the face of the oppressed, the poor, the stranger, the broken. God confronts me in the brokenness and exposure of the other, confronts me with a responsibility, such that actions toward the other become actions toward God.

[36] Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 16.

In the judgment scene in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 25:33-40), Christ admits into the kingdom only those whom he declares fed him when he was hungry, gave him drink when he was thirsty, clothed him when he was naked, made him welcome when a stranger, and visited him when in prison. What followed was an inquiry as to the time at which these deeds were performed. To which Christ responded with the familiar line: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). The point of the story should not be missed. The call of God came through the need of the other and only those who practiced self-emptying were able to create a space for the other and respond by receiving the other and attending the need. Examples of the call to consider the other abound in Scripture (Cf. Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Philippians 2:3; James 2:14-17), and should not be taken as ancillary to Christian formation, but must be understood as its very heart. The call of God comes in the nakedness and exposure of the other to which the only proper receptivity can be love. Nowhere does the command to consider the other become more evident than in the law of love (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:30-31).

Sacred Appearance, Incarnation, and the Law of Love

It is impossible, Carlo Carretto argues, to love a personal God and be indifferent to the suffering brother.[37] "Because if you pray to the living God," Carretto continues, "you who are living, He, the Living One, sends you to your living brother."[38] God confronts us in the brokenness and need of the other, but in the encounter with the other

[37] Carlo Carretto, *The God Who Comes*, trans. Rose Mary Hancock (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974), 179.

[38] Ibid.

only our responsibility is revealed. God comes in the need of the other and in doing so reveals our responsibility and opens the opportunity for sacred appearance. The sacred becomes present in the world only by incarnating itself. "For the Israelites," Mensch notes, "God becomes present in the law he gives to Moses."[39] The very life of Israel, her very identity, becomes intimately tied to the law, for by obedience to it Israel becomes the people of God. In this sense, as Mensch suggests, the relation of Israel to the sacred becomes justice,[40] but justice as demanded by love, for the law requires love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) and the just treatment of the stranger and foreigner (Exodus 23: 9). God becomes incarnate in the just actions of those who practice the law.[41] Practicing the presence of God becomes the practice of justice and love.

Here the point of spiritual practice and the presence of God can be made most pointedly. Through practice, the law and its demand for love and justice become embodied, inscribed in the joints and morrow of those who practice it as a way of life. Obedience to the law becomes formative practice and, as such, those practicing it become who they are by what they do. Much like the line from the Gerald Manley Hopkins poem *As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flames* that declares: "The just man justices."[42] This is embodied spiritual formation: The faithful person faiths. Through the embodied practices of the believing community God becomes present to the world in and through faithful response to the call. In other words, God confronts us in the brokenness

[39] Mensch, "Prayer as Kenosis," 65.

[40] See Ibid., 253-254, footnote 7.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Gerald Manley Hopkins, *Poems* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918).

and need of the other and there reveals our responsibility, but God becomes present in the world through our response of love and justice.

This brings the law of love front and center for spiritual formation, for Christ narrows the principle teaching of the law to love of God and love of neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). The ultimate call to self-emptying comes through the imperative to love the other—expressed most fully in the act of receiving the other. The other confronts us within the vicious cycle of an economy of exchange, stands before us broken and vulnerable, lays upon us a burden of responsibility, and opens the space for the appearance of the sacred. Remain committed to the economy and reject the other because there is nothing to receive in return, or exploit the other for what can be taken, and either way what appears to the world is the earthly economy in its bare sinful reality. Allow the intrusion of the other to break the totality of the economy by responding in love, by receiving the other who cannot reciprocate in kind, by practicing the law of love, and God becomes present in the world.

The importance of creating a space for God to become present to the world cannot be overstated. For much of the Church, the sacred cannot appear in the world, and this is so for a number of reasons. First, revelation has been reduced to the word as written text communicated to the believing community in terms of preaching and teaching doctrinal content. It no longer refers to a lived encounter opened through historical memory and enacted in the exposition of the narrative and the liturgical practices of the believing community which serve to situate it and give it meaning. Second, and following consequentially from the first, belief has been reduced to the cognitive appropriation of doctrinal content and, as such, divorced from practice. This may seem rather

inconsequential to the point, but it should not, for reducing belief to cognitive appropriation means God appears only to the mind as an object, rather than being encountered as a Subject to which I am subject. Third, and following as a consequence of the first two, the sacred, because it is inaccessible to anything but the mind, becomes the concern of the inner spiritual self and serves as a means of mystical escape from the drudgery and anxiety of this troubled world. Finally, the spirituality of late capitalist culture has become too individualistic and focused too narrowly on self-comfort and self-consumption to engage the world in any real sense of social justice in which the law of love practiced as social actions make God's presence possible.

As a result, the Church has in essence bypassed the incarnational aspect of God's presence in favor of some unmediated vision of God. Arising out of this unmediated vision of God are two different approaches to the way in which the sacred might be experienced. In the first way, as Mensch points out, total separation from the worldly economy through mystical experience becomes the goal.[43] In this way, we are drawn out of the world through mystical rapture and separated from the broader responsibility of making God present through embodied actions. In the second way, Mensch suggests, God gets drawn into the worldly economy and treated as a sacred good to be consumed.[44] God becomes a tool used to our advantage. Biblical spiritual formation opposes both, teaching instead that God becomes present in the world through the practices of the believing body in order to transform it.

[43] Mensch, "Prayer as Kenosis," 66-67.

[44] Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

PHYSICAL SPACE AND SENSUAL BODIES

The previous chapter suggests that for the Church to seriously consider developing a truly Christian *habitus* it must first reconsider the relationship of belief to practice. Typically spiritual formation is addressed didactically as a set of instructions or doctrinal content to which the initiate first gains some mental grasp and then implements by way of practice. It seldom works this way, however, for prior to acquiring an understanding of a set of doctrines the Christian engages in a set of practices that become both formative and transformative. Over time an established set of practices—because they become the standard way of doing and seeing things—will influence and shape beliefs. This troublesome tension between belief and practice can be overcome by thinking of belief as a practice, such that, thinking and doing both become necessary to Christian formation. It becomes imperative, therefore, that the Church establish both pedagogical content and formative practices that direct initiates in the faith according to and in support of historical Christian understandings.

Rethinking belief and practice as indivisible functions of embodiment forces the Church to think more broadly about how spiritual formation actually occurs and, in doing

so, it becomes clear that implementing practices that aim at biblical spiritual formation requires considering more than just the mind and body, for bodily practice entails the formative conditions in which the body is embedded. Material conditions such as physical place and space influence—facilitate or impede—bodily movements. In other words, the physical space will direct bodily action in certain ways thereby inscribing in the very bodies of worshipers certain fundamental beliefs and values. For this reason it becomes essential that the Church consider the physical layout of worship space, for the layout of the physical space not only directs bodily movement but also conveys priorities and purposes.

Physical Space, Bodily Movement, and Spiritual Formation

Protestants have long been suspicious of the sacralization of physical objects and that suspicion fosters a wariness of discussions concerning sacred space. After all, Stephen proclaims that "the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (Acts 7:48), and Paul claims that the human body now serves as the place of sacred dwelling (1Corinthians 6:19). Thus, providing a place for Christians to meet together for worship and study might be a typical Protestant understanding of church facilities—a place to meet the requirement of "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them (Matthew 18:20).[1]Let me not return here to the problem of the Protestant desacralization of the world, but let me grant, for the sake of discussion, that Christian space simply provides a place to meet together. Worshipers meet together bodily—not as

[1] For a discussion of the ways in which architectural form impacts religious belief and practice even within denominations evincing ambivalence toward physical structures, see Malcom Gold, "From the 'Upper Room' to the 'Christian Center': Changes in the Use of Sacred Space and Artifacts in a Pentecostal Assembly," in *Materializing Religion: Expression, Performance and Ritual*, ed. Elisabeth Arweck and William Keenan (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

disembodied egos—and because bodies matter, buildings matters. Meeting together in a physical space always involves bodily practices—often in the form of ritual practice—and whether it be acknowledged or not, these practices support conceptions of spirituality, God, worship, mission, and purpose. Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore suggest, "All architecture functions as a potential stimulus for movement, real or imagined. A building is an incitement to action, a stage for movement and interaction. It is one partner in a dialogue with the body."[2]

Entering a church, according to Richard Kieckhefer, becomes "a metaphor for entering a spiritual process: one of procession and return, or of proclamation and response, or of gathering in community and returning to the world outside."[3] The very form of sacred architecture—the organization of religious space—will follow from the conception of spiritual process it intends to foster and the formation it intends to promote.[4] Kieckhefer analyzes three of the most common ways architectural form can be linked to notions of spiritual process: the longitudinal space of sacramental churches which intend a spiritual process of procession and return; the auditorium space of traditional evangelical churches which intend a spiritual process of proclamation and response; and the space of modern communal churches with an emphasis on gathering in community and returning to the world outside. Thus, Kieckhefer concludes, that religious space plays a greater role than merely providing a place for liturgical practice, for the

[2] Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore, *Body, Memory, and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 59.

[3] Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

[4] Ibid.

physical space of worship facilities contributes in important ways to the very meaning of liturgical practice and to the content and meaning of the worship service in general.[5]

Physical Form and the Unspoken Message

It seems all too easy to make the layout of sacred space merely a matter of cognitive and conceptual concern. In other words, to understand the form of religious space presenting a certain visual (mental) image that then says something about conceptions of spiritual formation, but this is the Cartesian disembodied model. Architectural form directs bodily movement through space and thereby directs bodily practice in specific ways—practices that become formative.[6] Worshipers engage pre-reflectively in a set of practices from the moment they enter religious space—practices that influence the way they understand God, spirituality, community, and worship. In this way, if not careful, practices directed by physical form can work contrary to intended purposes.

For example, a church can unwittingly pander to the consumer mentality of late capitalist culture in ways that confirm through practice the deep seated conviction that Christianity primarily concerns the cognitive appropriation of doctrine and that Christian worship is primarily a matter of individual taste and personal consumption. This becomes most evident in the structure of the worship service and the physical structure of the worship facility. Often auditorium style facilities have a highly visible and central stage,

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[5] Ibid. See also Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[6] See Bloomer and Moore, *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, 57. The authors claim, "Our movements are ever subject to the same physical forces as are built forms and may be physically contained, limited, and directed by these forms."

but no obvious altar and concealed baptismal fonts. The centrality of the lectern and the worship band conveys the primacy of sight and sound as the means by which the message is received—it becomes highly, if not exclusively, cerebral. Many of these churches incorporate into worship practices the use of venues, visualizing technologies, and theater style seating without the slightest consideration of the ways in which these support practices and instantiate beliefs that are often contrary to the church's true aims.[7] To be clear, venues, visualizing technologies, and theater type seating are not bad in themselves, but they can facilitate practices that unwittingly convey the wrong message. Venues can bespeak consumer choice and foster individual preference over communal solidarity. Visualizing technologies and theater seating can promote the idea of the worshiper as passive spectator and the worship service as a commodity chosen primarily for its entertainment value. The very spatial orientation established by the architectural structure of worship facilities can belie what is truly intended of the worship service.

Deriding contemporary worship styles and architectural structures, however, proves of little value when they are supported by deep seated beliefs and practices imposed by prevailing cultural determinants. My point here remains constructive, aimed primarily at raising awareness of the ways in which physical spatial features orient

[7] A study of the historical development of contemporary auditorium style church architecture can be found in, Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theater: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). In this work Kilde argues that in the late nineteenth-century profound socio-economic and technological changes in the United States contributed to the rejection of traditional church architecture and gave rise to the development of a radically new worship building, the auditorium church. This radical shift in evangelical Protestant architecture, Kilde claims, brought about changes in worship style and altered conceptions of religious mission. For a study of the influence of consumer culture on worship space and worship style, see "The Spoken Word, Stage Performance, and Profits of Religious Spectacle," in R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 40-65, Chapter 2.

practitioners toward bodily actions that instantiate a particular orientation to spiritual formation. In other words, the structural design of worship facilities will influence worship practices, facilitating certain practices while impeding others.[8] Bodily movement through physical worship space will never be inconsequential to spiritual formation, for it will foster either an active or passive approach to spirituality, it will encourage self-willed consumerism or call forth self-emptying, it will facilitate or impede communal liturgical practices, but it will never be neutral.

Space, Power and Fidelity: Orienting the Practitioner

Architecture serves as a powerful medium for representing, ordering and classifying the world.[9] As such, Christian space is always dynamic and powerful space, and it often belies the function of power operative within it. To understand the power within churches—divine, sociopolitical, economic—close attention must be given to both material conditions and human experience. The material world can never be neutral; indeed, through physical spaces and material objects power structures are articulated and maintained.[10] The form of religious space, and the practices that form engenders, will articulate something of the power structure of the church. Thus, practices engendered by the form of religious space should serve in support of the message proclaimed concerning the centrality of divine power, but at times it does not. In other words, Sunday morning sermons can encourage fidelity to the presence and power of God, yet all the while the

[8] Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 3.

[9] See Michael Parker Pearson and Colin Richards, "Ordering the World: Perceptions of Architecture, Space, and Time," in *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, ed. Michael Parker Pearson and Colin Richards (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-33.

[10] Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 199.

practices directed by architectural form pledge allegiance to the sovereignty of the self—consumer choice, private spirituality, productivity and efficiency, entertainment—all practices imposed by prevailing cultural power structures. Failure to understand the pervasive influence of bodily practice in orienting practitioners, therefore, leaves churches vulnerable to practices imposed by worldly power structures—economic, cultural, or sociopolitical.

Religious space becomes powerful in its ability to orient believers both vertically toward God and horizontally toward others.[11] The idea of power, and the fidelity that follows from it, cannot be overlooked in the layout of worship facilities and worship services, for religious space serves as a means to orient practitioners to power: divine, social, and personal power.[12] This can never be a purely cognitive process, however, for religious space already draws the body in and engages it at pre-theoretical level, directing it to certain forms of practice and away from others. In this pre-reflexive manner the practices engendered by the space already articulates something of conceptions of power and fidelity. The issue really centers on whether religious space, and the bodily practices that space facilitates, positions God as the center of power and fidelity—not in word only but in practice—or whether it places the consumer self at the center as sovereign and the object of its own fidelity.

Religious space should be designed in such a way as to draw the worshipping body into a sense of nearness and awareness of the presence and power of God. It should facilitate a sense of interdependence on God and others by directing movement toward an

[11] See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1957), primarily Chapter 1, pages 20-65.

[12] Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 4.

encounter. As a communal act, worship spaces and services should facilitate a sense of interdependence by directing active and mutual participation in liturgical practices. As a bodily act, worship should engage and connect with the full range of senses; it should avoid the purely cerebral approach which limits sensory engagement to the visual and audial. As a creative act, worship should be performative and improvisational. As the liturgical enactment of communal historical memory, by which the call to remember confronts us with a profound sense of responsibility, creative performance becomes a means of living out and making present the call of God. Thus, worship must be construed in every way as a physical act intended to engage the whole person.

Sensual Bodies and Social Bodies: Physical Bodies at Worship

Biblical worship is in every way as much sensual as rational, as much physical as mental, and both the worship service and worship facilities ought to reflect this fact. What the gathered community does in the body at worship matters, precisely because the very reason of the gathering gets expressed in and through the bodies of those gathered. Bodily movements and gestures express reality in a visible way—that is, they make present a reality that would otherwise remain hidden. James Empereur notes, "Something of transcendence will never reach visibility if our worshipping communities are not physical in their expression."[13] For this reason, the very physicality of worship must be considered and worship structured in such a way as to direct bodily action in the form of liturgical and ritual practice—for physicality marks an essential character of religious life.

[13] James L. Empereur, S.J., "The Physicality of Worship," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 138.

Religious Practice, Social Expression, and Corporate Identity

Ritual practice has long been an important part of group identity, for the regular performance of ritual practice expresses group belonging and loyalty.[14] Nevertheless, the very term ritual, and even liturgy, evokes suspicion in many circles of Evangelical Christianity, for many of the same reasons that physicality evokes suspicion, but it need not. Humans are ritualizing beings, as Ronald Grimes points out, "there is no escaping ritualization—the stylized cultivation or suppression of biogenetic and psychosomatic rhythms and repetitions."[15] Ritual, as Margaret Kelleher suggests, refers to "social, symbolic, and processual action in which meanings and values can be communicated, created, and transformed."[16] Thus, the action performed in the body at worship not only forms individual and corporate identity and meaning, but it becomes a means of conveying that identity and meaning publicly.

Ritual practice becomes a means of social expression—of making visible a reality that otherwise may remain hidden. It is social, as Kelleher claims, because ritual emerges from within the life of a social body, is performed by the social body, and participates in the life of the social body. Ritual expression is symbolic, she claims, because symbols serve as the basic units of ritual practice, thus words, gestures, actions, relationships, and the arrangement of religious space can all serve symbolic functions. The processual nature of ritual, Kelleher suggests, derives from the dynamism within ritual action—it

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[14] See Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

[15] Ibid., 42-43.

[16] Margaret Mary Kelleher, "The Liturgical Body: Symbol and Ritual," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 54.

gathers around a movement or rhythm.[17] As such, ritual serves as a support structure for meaning and belonging and therefore can never be neutral regarding formation of identity and never operates independent of physical bodies. In fact, Catherine Bell, who was influenced by the work of Bourdieau, suggests that ritualization produces ritualized bodies through the repeated interaction of bodies with the ritual structures.[18] That is, the physical movement associated with ritual practice creates a structure which, in turn, acts to restructure bodies towards some determined end.[19] It should be evident, then, that physical bodies and physical space are important to the structure and meaning of worship, but now let us look more closely at the body in worship

Bodies, Sacrifices, and True Worship: Romans 12:1

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, having redrawn the boundaries of the people of God, Paul turns his address in Chapter 12 to the required characteristics incumbent upon the new community. In the opening verse, Paul declares that offering the body as a spiritual sacrifice to God becomes the believer's act of true worship (Romans 12:1). Tellingly, Paul does not abandoned the language of cultic ritual practice, but takes up cultic terms in order to instill within them a new meaning.[20] Not by accident, Paul uses language that would connect with his audience, but connect in a way that confirms the importance and continuation of bodily practice in worship. The language of sacrifice

[17] Ibid., 55.

[18] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.

[19] Ibid., 98-100.

[20] See James D.G. Dunn, "Romans 9-16," in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard, et. al. (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 717.

which was so central to ancient worship, Douglas Moo notes, "made it a natural and inevitable vehicle for the early Christians to express their own religious convictions."[21] In Paul's redefinition of the term, the sacrifice God requires of the new community, as Dunn notes, "is no longer that of beast and bird in temple, but the daily commitment of life lived within the constraints and relationships of this bodily world."[22] In other words, the sacrifice required of the new community should not be understood in reference to specific objects given; but rather, to the very body of the giver.

Paul qualifies the sacrifice of the body, as Moo makes note, with three adjectives.[23] As a "living" sacrifice it continues in its efficacy, as opposed to dying at the moment of sacrifice. As such, the sacrifice marks a continual living out of an offering of the entire self to God as a means of worship. As a "holy" sacrifice it implies that the offering of our bodies involves our being set apart from the common world in dedicated service to God—which carries both cultic and moral implication.[24] Only bodily sacrifice, as a daily living out the process of being set apart to the service of God, can become a "well pleasing sacrifice."[25] In redefining the requirements of cultic worship in this way, Paul encourages a different kind of community—a community marked by the sacrifice of self-giving. While at the same time, Dunn claims, insisting that the sacrifice take concrete bodily expression in order to prevent his thought from degenerating into a form of

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[21] Douglas Moo, "The Epistle to the Romans," in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament,* ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 750.

[22] Dunn, "Romans 9-16," 717.

[23] See Moo, "The Epistle to the Romans," 751.

[24] Moo, "The Epistle to the Romans," 751, fn. 34; Dunn, "Romans 9-16," 716-717.

[25] For a more detailed discussion of the three adjectives modifying sacrifice, see Moo, "The Epistle to the Romans," 751-754.

"unworldly pietism" or "enthusiastic dualism."[26] Paul presents a view of Christian spirituality, therefore, not as disembodied or body denying, but as a way of living in and through the physical body.

Worship, Material Objects, and the Sensate Body

Even though Paul defines the sacrifice required of Christians as spiritual, he does not separate it from the material world and reduce it to mere interiority. True worship requires the body, thus the body becomes the locus of worship and the spiritual life. After all, the body serves as the means by which humans can sense things—the very notion of sensing requires the sensate body. There is no need to demand a strict distinction between the inner senses and the outer senses as though they operate independently. To see with the "eye of the mind" requires the physical sense organ to supply it with the material for contemplation, but unless the eye of the mind sees, nothing has really been seen.[27] The same can be said of the soul "hearing," for example, when it imaginatively recollects or gives mental attention to God, but it does so by means of being conjoined with the auditory function of the physical body.[28] Thus, sensing has a dual aspect, according to Catherine Pickstock, an inner and an outer which stands in accord with the double

[26] Dunn, "Romans 9-16," 717.

[27] Catherine Pickstock, "Liturgy and the Senses," in John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek and Creston Davis, *Paul's New Movement: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 134.

[28] Ibid.

biblical meaning of the "heart."[29] Worship requires a response of the incarnate soul—the heart—to the incarnate God and this response will always involve the body.[30]

Bodily Participation in Worship

The body participates in worship through a wide range of symbolic actions which in one way or another engage the physical senses. In baptism the body and water come into physical contact in the ritual act of cleansing intended to signify identification with Christ and a being set apart to God. The body engages through tactile sensation as the water touches the skin, the ears hear the words spoken as the rite is administered, and the eyes engage with others present. In like manner, the Eucharist engages all the senses as the bread and wine are consumed. The Eucharist becomes a full sensory experience in which the elements are present to sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. Additionally, many churches practice anointing with oil and laying-on of hands which involve body to body contact, it involves tactility as well as sight and hearing. Some traditions practice burning incense which involves olfactory perception. Further, these practices involve material objects such as oil, water, incense, bread and wine which situate the act of worship materially.

An important point should be noted, these practices do more than serve as a means to mental representation, they do more than elicit cognitive recall or represent some external reality. They are the enactment of communal historical memory by which the divine call to remember continually confronts us with an imperative of responsibility.

[29] Ibid. Pickstock is commenting on the work of Jean Louis Chrétien in this section. The double biblical sense of the term "heart" refers to the heart as a physical organ and the heart as the soul or inner life of the person.

[30] Ibid.

They provide the means by which God is made manifest to the world in tangible visible form. These material actions give rise to spiritual reality. Remember the Jewish prayer; "We thank You for the covenant sealed in our flesh." The act of circumcision, performed in the body as an act of obedience to God, brought about the spiritual reality of being rightly related to God and one another through fidelity to the covenant. God does, nevertheless, require more than the foreskin—relationship to God goes deeper than the flesh and involves more than national identity—God requires our whole being and thus circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:29) implies a total self-giving, a total fidelity, in which the Christian lives out obedience to God daily through bodily actions. As part of the continual process of spiritual formation, the bodily participation in the liturgical practices of the Church marks a necessary condition for an ongoing response to the call of God.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work has been to explore the role of the body and material practice in spiritual formation with the intent to ascertain the ways in which spiritual meaning and identity are formed. As an interdisciplinary reflection, this work has drawn from a diverse range of scholarly resources, such as cultural anthropology, the social sciences, the social science of religion, biblical studies, philosophy, and theology. Aimed at provoking further thought on the subject, this work argues that bifurcating tendencies in the history of western thought have obscured thinking about or denied access to the relatedness of two very important dimensions of human existence: spiritual and corporeal. On the one hand, spirituality becomes nothing more than an abstract quality that has little or nothing to do with daily lived experience. This has left much of the Church without any real understanding of what spirituality means to the actual lives they live here and now. On the other hand, the body becomes a peculiar character, present yet elusive, God's good creation yet our biggest problem, ignored by the church yet fashioned by culture and society. Thus, rejecting the body or taming it becomes the default theological position of many within the Christian tradition.

These views arise as a result of a long history of ambivalence towards the body. The search to ground the self in terms of immaterial and immutable properties tended to direct discourse away from the tangible yet mutable and vulnerable body. With the rise of reason and the transcendental self in the modern era, the body all but disappears. It did not disappear completely; however, it remained hidden deep in the recesses of tradition waiting to be remembered. By mid-twentieth century it reappeared with a vengeance,

remembered by those disgruntled with its neglect under the cold reign of reason. Nevertheless, the cult of the sensual, like the cult of the cerebral, neglects the body as such. If the cult of the cerebral denied that the body mattered, the cult of the sensual has made it the locus of all that matters.

As the source of all that matters the body gets conscripted through practices imposed by social and cultural forces whose loyalty belongs to capitalist agendas and not biblical spiritual formation. The only way to effectively oppose these formative forces is to understand the body and its role in forming identity and producing meaning. If the body "knows" through repeated performance of actions, then the Church needs to develop more fully and intentionally its own formative practices. Bringing together knowing and doing, belief and practice, as co-constitutive and mutually necessary to biblical spiritual formation define the purpose of this work. Spirituality cannot be reduced to an inner journey; rather it involves the entire person, body, soul, and social and cultural conditions. This includes the physical space used to support spiritual processes, for physical space serves as part of the formative material conditions which shape understanding of spirituality.

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